

THE DEATH OF TIDERICUS  
THE ORGANIST  
PLAGUE AND CONSPIRACY THEORY  
IN HANSEATIC VISBY

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*Cover image:* Cristoforo Cortese, detail of an angel playing an organ, from a historiated initial depicting The Ascension, Stanford M2223, item 27 (Veneto, c.1430-40). Courtesy of the T. Robert & Katherine States Burke Collection of Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Miniatures, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

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## PREFACE

I am very grateful to Alison Finlay and Carl Phelpstead for being receptive to the idea of this study. I would also like to thank the two anonymous readers who made many insightful suggestions. Carl Phelpstead provided extremely helpful comments, particularly on matters of liturgy. Lena Rohrbach and her students invited me to discuss the matter of Tidericus with them in Zürich, and I greatly appreciated their invitation and the resulting conversations. Kristen Mills immeasurably improved the Latin translation (though any errors that persist, either in the Latin or elsewhere, are entirely my own), and provided invaluable comments on several drafts in the early stages of the project. Lukas Rösli asked the difficult New Philological questions that this Old Philologist needed to hear, and for that I am thankful. I would like to express my appreciation to Marlin Khondoker at the archives of the London Borough of Islington for her expertise in archival practice. Hugh Atkinson provided extensive help with proofreading and style-guide consistency. Anders Andrén and Stephen Mitchell granted permission to use their photographs. I owe a debt to Bettina Erlenkamp and Kerstin Schellbach at the Sächsische Landesbibliothek in Dresden for providing me with the images of Mscr. Dresd. A. 59 and permission to reproduce them in this study.

Stephen Mitchell deserves particular thanks, being the person who first alerted me to the Visby burnings while I was on a flying visit to Massachusetts in 2011. While the hunt for details which ensued has had its oddly pleasurable moments, the case of Tidericus turned out to be stranger and more horrid the deeper I went. As a historian with a background in philology, my instinct was to approach the problem as one of narrative (what was the story being told about Tidericus? How could this be integrated with other narratives provided by other historians about the time and place in which he lived?). But every so often I found myself disturbed by jolting reminders that Tidericus really did once live and die, in a way that I had never experienced when studying semi-historical personages in the Icelandic sagas. He must have been a certain height, a certain age, had a face, a family, dreams, perhaps a first kiss—and if so, a last kiss—all the profound and humdrum experiences which constitute a life. All of this is lost. However, I hope that what cannot be said of Tidericus *the life* is somewhat compensated for by what can be

said of Tidericus *the example*. His was just one amongst uncountable lives lost in the persecutions surrounding the Black Death, and indeed in subsequent attempts at genocide and mass murder up to our own days. One cannot help but wonder how far the types of ideological and political mechanisms which claimed his life, also claimed theirs.

King's Lynn, Whitsun 2018



## INTRODUCTION

*Ibi predictum ad littora [in littore?] fodit [fossus est?] et ibi remansit* (CdL, 103–05) ‘There, on the shore, the aforementioned man was buried, and there he will stay’. This is all we know of the final resting place of a man known to us as ‘Tidericus’, probably ‘Diderik’ in his own language. He was burnt at the stake in the town of Visby, Gotland, on the 2nd July 1350 in *profesto sanctorum Processi et Martiniani* ‘on the Saint’s Day of St. Martinian and Processus’. Tidericus was one of nine who had been convicted by the authorities in Visby for their role in an alleged poisoning conspiracy. As in so many other European cities, such as Barcelona, Basel and Toulon, the appearance of the Black Death in Visby was being blamed on the Jews. But Tidericus was not a Jew. Neither were any of his co-accused. Indeed, the general consensus amongst scholars is that Visby did not have a single Jewish inhabitant at the time (Trachtenberg 1966, 104).

Some of the supposed guilty parties could not have had better gentile credentials. As their accusers themselves record, *inter predictos novem duo fuerunt, qui se pro sacerdotibus reputaverunt, qui deteriora omnibus prefatis fatebantur* ‘amongst the aforementioned nine there were two who thought of themselves as priests, who admitted to the worst deeds of them all’. The Hanseatic administrators condemned fellow Christians to their deaths, alleging them to be in league with Jewish agents based abroad.<sup>1</sup> We shall examine the details more closely later, but for now it will suffice to illustrate the richness of the fantasy which seized the minds of the Visbyers to note that it centred around a worldwide conspiracy of powerful men who identified each other by wearing silver belts, and by inscribing themselves with secret tattoos in Greek and Hebrew letters.

The anonymising erasure of Tidericus’s body, deliberately lost somewhere on a Gotlandic beach, foreshadows the curious silence that

<sup>1</sup> While the Hanseatic League proper is often considered not to have been established until 1356, multiple *Hanses* were corresponding, co-operating and making treaties from the thirteenth century onwards. The use of the terms ‘Hansards’, ‘Hansa men’ and ‘Hanseatic’ in this study denotes an affiliation to this network of German trading bodies. On the recognition of the Hansa men as a discrete interest group in medieval Scandinavia, see Wubs-Mrozewicz 2008, 44–47. More broadly, see Stein 1911, 265–363.

surrounds the death of the nine men that summer. The only sources to mention anything of what transpired are two pieces of Hanseatic correspondence. One, which I call Letter A, is from the Councillors of Lübeck to Duke Otto of Lüneburg (d. 1352). The other, Letter B, is by the Councillors of Rostock reproducing an original letter from the Councillors of Visby.<sup>2</sup> Beyond this, history remains reticent. There is no brief remark in an annal, nothing in the otherwise fairly comprehensive Swedish *diplomatarium*, no surviving correspondence mentioning the victims prior to their arrests, no commemorative runic inscription of the type which is otherwise prevalent in Scandinavia, particularly on Gotland. The reluctance to address Tidericus and his co-accused has largely been perpetuated by modern scholars too. Jonathan Adams (2013, 85, 117), whose recently published *Lessons in Contempt* is an excellent and ground-breaking introduction to anti-Judaism in East Norse sources, briefly synthesises the events of 1350 against their European background, but understandably finds the topic to be beyond the purview of his work. Sven Erik Pernler (1977, 210–11) consulted the letters and remarked with indifference only that they *omtalar att plebanus vid S:t Olof jämte flera 'sacerdotes' dog i pesten* 'mention that a layman from St. Olaf's Church together with several "sacerdotes" died during the Plague'. Each of the few very brief descriptions provided in general works on antisemitism or the Black Death amounts to less than a page (see Trachtenberg 1966, 104; Benedictow 2004, 178; Aili 1990, 19 n. 1, n. 2; Harrison 2000, 507–08; Harrison 2013). Publications on Gotlandica treat the incident somewhat more fully, but in doing so tend more towards retelling than analysis (see Wase 2010, 149, 242; Jacobowsky 1973, 5–6).

The fullest studies are four separate interventions by Jonny Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen (2014, 59–74), Cordelia Heß (2015a, 109–25), Stephen Mitchell (2014, 155–74) and Ulrich Simon (2010, 107–46). None takes the Visby burnings as its principal focus, but all treat them in passing, shedding much light on the issue as they go. Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen

<sup>2</sup> The Latin text of Letter A and Letter B was edited by Wehrmann in *CdL*, 103–05. Letter B was subsequently re-edited by Hans Aili (*Egb*, 14–21). For convenience, I have provided full English translations and new editions of both in the appendices. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. The meaning is obscure in the *fodit / fossus* sentence quoted above, and there may have been a mistake in the Hanseatic clerk's Latin, which has elsewhere frequently required emendation both by Wehrmann, and later Aili and myself. Wehrmann suggests that the grammatical object might have been the money supposedly given to Tidericus; however, the letter otherwise implies the money has been spent (103, n. 1).



focuses primarily on the impact of the Black Death on the Dominican friars in medieval Scandinavia. In doing so, he is the first to suggest in print that the ‘two who thought of themselves as priests’ were most likely wandering preachers, and if not Dominicans themselves, then at least maintaining a similarly mobile and mendicant lifestyle. The main contribution of Heß is to depict the case of Visby alongside similar cases from other Low-German-dominated Baltic towns.<sup>3</sup> Using mostly Prussian accounts of the plague, she demonstrates that the allegations in Visby followed a pattern commonly used in the area. A very similar line of questioning is pursued by Simon, although Simon is more focused on the social conditions and anti-Jewish atmosphere in the Hanseatic mother city of Lübeck. Mitchell takes up the question why such seemingly remarkable events are not recorded at all in Gutnish sources—an absence made stranger by the fact that Gotland is to no little extent ‘an island of memory’, where picture stones, runic inscriptions, Gotlandic chroniclers<sup>4</sup> and vernacular Old Gutnish literature provided an abundance of means to record local traditions. Mitchell (2014, 169) makes the tentative suggestion that ‘perhaps it was so great a crime against the senses that it had to be actively erased’. This accords with the explanation which will be presented in this book in so far as it will be posited that, in the aftermath of the Visby burnings, many constituencies would not have found it in their interests to rake over the ashes of what had transpired. As will be seen, the great damage done to the social fabric by the Black Death might well have presented an opportunity for uprising, but once

<sup>3</sup> One might quibble with her assertion that ‘none of the trials was the result of the casualties in the town where the trial was held—the accused in Lübeck were punished for casualties in Prussia, and the accused in Visby for casualties elsewhere in Sweden and Prussia’ (Heß 2015a, 119). As will be seen, the letter from Visby seems to implicate the poisoners in deaths that occurred specifically amongst the congregation of Saint Olaf. This is, however, a minor issue and Heß’s study remains the fullest and most penetrating to date.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. The *Chronica Guthilandorum* by Hans Strelow (1633), a valuable mine of folkloric tradition despite its late date, *Cimbrorum et Gothorum origines* by Nicolaus Petreius (1573–79), and to a limited extent the *Diarum fratrum minorum Visbyensium* (1412), also known as *Visbykrönikan* or *Visbyfranciskanernas bok*. Strelow and Petreius were not native authors, but their works both concern and were written on Gotland. The island also boasts two further Latin authors, though admittedly neither are authors of works which could touch on the events of 1350: the Dominican Petrus de Dacia (d. 1289) and the preacher Olavus Johannis Guto (d. 1516). On the richness of Gotlandic writing, disproportionate to the island’s diminutive size, see Mitchell 2014, 157–60.

Tidericus and his co-accused were instead sacrificed to maintain the status quo, silence would have been the stablest option. The work of Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen, Heß and Mitchell notwithstanding, it is still true to say that an instance of Judaeophobic violence, which took place in a country without a single Jewish inhabitant, has gone mostly unmentioned, and largely unexcavated.

### **The Treatment of Antisemitism in Scandinavian Historiography**

The burning of Tidericus is quite exceptional in Scandinavian history, being the only anti-Jewish panic in the region during the Middle Ages, and also one of very few known instances of burning at the stake in pre-Reformation Scandinavia (Mitchell 2016, 35–56). But it was concomitant with a larger wave of violence taking place on the continent. Elsewhere, Jews were being massacred for their alleged responsibility for the plague (Cohn 2007, 3–36; concerning an earlier but similar issue, see Barber 1981, 1–17). The accusations of the Gotlandic Hansards also held the Jews responsible, putting the Visby burnings in the strange position of being the only one in a series of antisemitic persecutions where not a single actual Jew was harmed and all involved parties were Christians. How then ought we to describe the attitude towards Jews exhibited by the Visbyers? The nomenclature of Jew-hatred (used here interchangeably with Judaeophobia, intended as equivalent to academic German *Juden-hass*) in medieval studies has long been a complex issue.<sup>5</sup> Some commentators argue that the only appropriate appellation for hostility towards Jews during the Middle Ages is ‘anti-Judaism’. In this line of thought, there is nothing that we would now consider to be ‘racial’ in the various imaginings of Jews produced by medieval culture. Their position implies that Judaeophobic sentiments drew their inspiration, their substance and their means of expression exclusively from the faculties of faith. Other scholars are content to use the word ‘antisemitism’ alongside ‘anti-Judaism’.<sup>6</sup>

The terminological debate runs the risk of tedium, but the mechanisms underpinning it are relevant to our understanding of the Visby burnings. As David Nirenberg (2007, 71–87) has pointed out, the attraction of some scholars to the terms ‘antisemitic’ and ‘racial’ is rooted in the

<sup>5</sup> For a good account of the debate, see Chazan 1997, 126–29. See also Bale 2010b, 3–4.

<sup>6</sup> For a view of the validity of this scholarly schism in a medieval Scandinavian context, see Cole 2015b, 239–66.

recognition that some medieval Jew-haters were attracted by ideas of immutability ('a Jew is always a Jew, even after baptism'), or biology ('a Jew has a certain sort of body').<sup>7</sup> In other words, what some scholars call antisemitism is in fact a specific domain of Jew-hatred—a domain that can be demarcated regardless of whether one accepts the terminology used to describe it. Anti-Judaism also constitutes a particular domain, pertaining more to matters of doctrine (e.g., 'we must find ways to make Jews accept Christ', 'How could the Jews of Palestine have failed to recognise the Messiah?' etc.). Importantly, these domains sometimes overlap: as in an example illuminated by Steven Kruger (1993, 34–35; cf. Resnick 2012, 49–52), where a Jewish *body* is depicted as queer and degenerate, in order to convey the message that the Jewish *reading of scripture* is queer and degenerate. The imaginary Jews depicted in Letters A and B belong rather more in the domain of concerns over Jewish bodies and Jewish half-formed intellects than the domain of Jewish souls needing to be saved. As will be seen, the Jews are described as deranged (a common Judaeophobic trope both in anti-Judaism and antisemitism, see Scheil 2004, esp. 43–46, 259–73; Lipton 2014, 106–07, 113; Resnick 2012, 207–09), *omnes tales incedunt quasi deliri et aliquialiter insensati* 'all half mad or crazed in some other way', their bodies are said to be inscribed with oriental tattoos, and there is more figuration of the Jew as an implacable enemy of Christendom than as a mistaken enemy of Christ. Such lurid fantasies arguably justify Dick Harrison's (2013) description of Tidericus's death as *tidig svensk antisemitism* 'early Swedish antisemitism' or Nils Ahnlund's (1953, 173) use of the phrase *utslag av antisemitism* 'outbreak of antisemitism'.

Another noticeable trend in scholarly evaluations of Jew-hatred surrounding the Visby affair, and in consideration of Judaeophobia in medieval Scandinavia more widely, is the tendency to describe such sentiments as 'imported'. Alf Åberg (1963, 78) wrote that *Till anklagelserna mot judarna måste gotlänningarna ha fått inspiration utifrån, eftersom de vid denna tid knappast sett några andra judar än*

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed exploration of this domain, which does not deploy 'race' or 'antisemitism', see Resnick 2012, 13–52. Cf. Sara Lipton's reminder that 'simply labeling artists or patrons, or the general culture, as antisemitic tells us little about why these [Judaeophobic] images were made or what they meant to the people who made and viewed them' (2014, 3). From a medievalist's perspective, antisemitism ought to be understood as a 'label', or a banner under which certain discourses can be grouped. It is not necessarily a meaningful diagnosis in its own right.

*dem som var avbildade i kyrkorna* ‘For the accusations against Jews the Gotlanders must have got inspiration from abroad, as by that time they can hardly have seen Jews other than those that were depicted in churches’. Benedictow (2004, 178) repeats this position, describing the mentality of the Visbyers as ‘an attitude that obviously was imported to Visby from abroad, because there is no indication in the sources of the medieval Nordic countries of a Jewish presence at any time’.<sup>8</sup> The earliest commentator, Ahnlund (1953, 173), called Gotlandic antisemitism *importigods utifrån* ‘imported goods from abroad’. This echoes a contemporaneous article by Bjarne Berulfsen (1958, 123–44), which designated antisemitism in neighbouring medieval Norway as a *litterær importvare* ‘literary imported good’. Qualifying antisemitism as ‘imported’ is a remarkable strategy, as is viewing it as a commodity. The implication, if not the intention, is to minimise the agency of those who express antisemitic notions. It implies that the antisemitism in their minds or that they committed with their own hands somehow belonged to another party. By describing their feelings with the commercial language of *importigods* or *importvare*, antisemitism is imagined as something produced of a piece, ready to be used by Scandinavians straight out of the box, without needing any input from the user’s own imagination. Indeed, as all cultures exhibiting Judaeophobia must obviously learn of the existence of Jews before they can be hostile to them, and to do so they must acquire knowledge from others, surely all antisemitism is ‘imported’? A neater approach would be to abandon the distinction between ‘imported’ and ‘indigenous’ altogether.

The keenness of scholars to mitigate the events in Visby and other Scandinavian expressions of antisemitism as somehow foreign or aberrant may well be a distortion arising from a clash of narratives. One of the cornerstones of ‘Nordic Exceptionalism’ is the (self-)perception that the Nordic countries are specially enlightened, rational and tolerant (Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen 2012, 1–11). The rescue of the Danish Jews during the Second World War, where the vast majority of Denmark’s Jewish population was evacuated to neutral Sweden before they could be seized by the German occupiers, has also helped cement the notion that Scandinavia was somehow different from other European countries in

<sup>8</sup> However, Benedictow does qualify Åberg by adding that ‘the ground may have been prepared for the internalization of prejudiced attitudes from paintings on church walls, from the iconography of triptychs, and from religious legends’. This can be read as a false dichotomy: antisemitism cannot be described as an import unless those church walls, etc., are too.

its attitudes towards ethnic Others. One popular but nonetheless detailed history of Jews in the Nordic countries is even titled simply *Undtagelsen* 'The Exception'. Its point of departure, unsurprisingly, is that the Nordic countries are unique in that they have never known antisemitic bloodshed (Hammerich 1992). Berulfsen's article, though published in 1958, was a response to an experience he had had during the German occupation of Denmark and Norway in 1941. He had opened a new Danish thesaurus to find on the first page that the entry for *Aagerkarl* 'usurer' supplied the word *Jøde* 'Jew'. Under such circumstances (concern that German Nazism was influencing Scandinavian values) it is easy to see how a scholar would be motivated to write about how medieval antisemitism had been an *importvare*—one which, according to Berulfsen, had never really thrived in its new home.

The metanarrative of exceptionalism still frames the scholarly perspective in the twenty-first century. Benedictow was writing in 2004. It is not to devalue or quibble with any scholar's work to point out that minimising antisemitism is crucial to the reconciliation of the modern Nordic nation branding as a region friendly to Jewish people with historical Jew-hatred in Scandinavia (Lammers 2011, esp. 571–78; cf. Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjálmsson 2003, 102–17). In this book I have already been unable to avoid acknowledging the impact of the Second World War on our particular field of inquiry. Similarly, Jonathan Adams begins his excellent study of anti-Judaism in the Danish version of the *Iudeorum secreta* (1516) with 'the story of how countless Danish men and women, at great risk both to themselves and their families, saved their Jewish neighbours from being arrested and deported to the camps of central and Eastern Europe during World War II' (Adams 2013, 1).<sup>9</sup> To write a book pertaining to any kind of Judaica in Denmark without mentioning the stories of heroism of the famous rescue of the Danish Jews (*Jødeaktionen* or *Redningen af de danske jøder*) would appear negligent. It is unthinkable not to mention the more recent history, yet the tension between modern Nordic self-perception and an understudied Nordic past of intolerance is unwelcome.

We are presented with a miserable double-bind: The historian or philologist who dismisses the domain of antisemitism in a medieval Scandinavian context does not intend to reconcile Scandinavia's

<sup>9</sup> The correlation I have observed in no way questions the sincerity or rigour of Adams's work, which is essential reading for anybody interested in perceptions of Jews in medieval Scandinavia. Rather, I want to stress that there are certain paths which one must walk if one wishes to investigate Scandinavian antisemitism.

occasionally ugly past with its often well-regarded present. Similarly, those who recognise the domain of antisemitism do not intend a scathing prosecution of the Scandinavian Middle Ages. Nonetheless, the unintended consequence is inescapable for both parties. While the historian or philologist acts in good faith, he/she bolsters the worldview of the Nordic exceptionalist when he/she denies that medieval Scandinavians were capable of antisemitism. By the same token, historians or philologists open themselves to charges of blame-seeking or self-righteous controversialism when they find antisemitism in their study of medieval Scandinavia. (Of course, such charges would be just as hollow as the counter-accusation of deliberately aiding and abetting Nordic exceptionalism—ultimately, recognising that the history of Scandinavia contains a few distressing episodes should normalise rather than taint the historiography of the region, making it no worse morally than that of any other region in the world.) It is all we can do to acknowledge the innocence of our intentions, knowing that we labour under the irresistible weight of history. That is to say, we cannot escape the fact that any study of Judaeophobia in medieval Scandinavia has implications for the ideology of Nordic exceptionalism. While bearing that fact in mind, however, the present study strives to examine the events of 1350 in their proper medieval context, without consciously attempting to undermine or fortify the modern Nordic exceptionalist project.

While I reject the implication that antisemitism in medieval Scandinavia was somehow alien to native values, the question of transmission raised by the redundant notion of ‘importing’ may yet be instructive. We will need to bear in mind the dialectical relationship between the ordinary people of Visby and the Hanseatic administrators who were the architects of Tidericus’s death. The Visbyers would have constituted an audience for narratives authored by the town council, but the town council would also have needed to calculate how far they could go before the Visbyers rejected their accusations as implausible. By understanding the *Weltanschauung* of their citizens, the councillors of Visby would have sought not only to exploit psychological features that were already present in the population, but also to reshape them. This touches on the necessary—and possibly insoluble—question of how and why people adopt antisemitic attitudes, to which we return in more detail at the end of this study. Of particular importance for our purposes is Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of antisemitism. It is a theory that is useful for situations where there are not actually any Jewish people present to fall victim to antisemitism, because it offers explanations of the antisemites’ thought and actions based on their own worries, frailties and failings.

These are the factors which would be governing antisemites' behaviour even if no Jews were present: 'If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him' (Sartre 1995, 13). For example, Sartre looked at the French *petit bourgeois* antisemites of the 1940s and saw a people dimly aware that their wealth was not born of production (as it was for the workers), and who were struggling to reconcile their lack of cultural capital with their claims to ownership of an august national identity going back to the Middle Ages. Jews became foils to explain and soothe these anxieties. Jews were understood as the ultimate parasites, thus deflecting introspection over the parasitism of the middle class on labour. The Jewish Frenchman was supposed to be less French than a gentile. 'Why? Because I possess Racine—Racine and my country and my soil', as Sartre imagined an antisemite saying (1995, 24).

Sartre's theory is not perfect. It contains alarming statements, such as the claim that antisemitism was virtually unknown amongst the working class (1995, 35), and his troubling acceptance that Eastern European Jews had a particular physical appearance (1995, 61–62). Moreover, although he stresses repeatedly in his theory that antisemitism stemmed from the minds of gentiles rather than the actions of Jews, part of his essay is concerned with the Jewish response to antisemitism (1995, esp. 66–96). In this section, which was already redundant, the unhelpful concept of the 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' Jew is introduced (1995, 135–39). His theory is useful in situations where antisemitism has flourished in an absence of Jewish life, but in situations where Jews *are* present, one might protest that it de-emphasises the real cost of antisemitism. Some people passionately hate Jews, and on account of this commit terrible acts. In the wake of tragedy it is not always welcome to explain the antisemite's actions with factors that are not directly related to Jewish people and/or Judaism (although it must be stressed that Sartre never doubted the sincerity of the antisemites' feelings—he wanted to stress that Jews cannot control the antisemite's delusions). These issues, together with the book's lack of historical detail, have impeded the popularity of Sartre's theory in modern antisemitism research (Rybalka 1999). However, Sartre's contribution, flawed though it may be and drawn from a period very different from the Middle Ages, can be extended in a useful way. The antisemite's problems in life are real, even though his/her diagnosis of their cause as having anything to do with Jewish people is indefensible. The lower-middle-class Frenchman of the 1940s probably often did feel dissatisfied with his lot, subconsciously uncertain of his place in the means of production. The Visbyer of 1350 did face the plague, and did live in a city that was in conflict with its hinterland.

Obviously, Jews did not cause any of these problems. To believe that Jews *did* cause these problems (or any other problem) may be imputed to ignorance, but it must also be thought of as a type of cowardice. In my modified Sartrean interpretation, antisemites choose to blame the Jews for two reasons, which often overlap: 1) they dare not reckon with the complexity of the real cause of their problems, and the dramatic, painful solutions they may require (for example, overthrowing the prevailing political or economic orthodoxy); 2) they prefer to pick a pointless battle against a vulnerable enemy rather than picking a productive battle against a strong enemy.

The sophistication of terminology surrounding negative attitudes towards Jews may surprise a newcomer to the field. One could go further down this path. There has also been controversy over whether 'antisemitism' should be spelt 'anti-Semitism'. One commentator claims that the latter spelling is itself an antisemitic utterance: 'if you hyphenate your "anti-semitism", you attach some credence to the very foundation on which the whole thing rests' (Almog 1989, 1–2). The reasoning here is that the hyphen would imply that 'Semitism' is a real thing which could be combatted, presumably some sort of alleged Jewish perfidy. The critic continues: 'Strike out the hyphen and you will treat antisemitism for what it really is—a generic name for modern Jew-hatred which now embraces this phenomenon as a whole'. This is a position which has achieved orthodoxy in the field. However, it is not irreproachable. First, there is already a name for generic Jew-hatred. 'Jew-hatred' itself is a name for generic Jew-hatred, and Judaeophobia will do for those who prefer Graeco-Latinate vocabulary. Secondly, if antisemitism and anti-Judaism are to be differentiated, as many medievalists prefer, then 'Semitism' must mean something else as real as 'Judaism'. It must refer to the fantastic obsession with Jews, which conceives of Jewish people as a group whose importance is out of all proportion to the fact that they constitute only a tiny percentage of the population. In this study, we are concerned mostly with antisemitism, but there is also such a thing as philosemitism: ideas about Jews which are as divorced from reality as antisemitism, but project positive qualities (even if these sometimes come at a price: the Jews must be wonderfully intelligent because they are poor sportsmen, or the Jews must be morally upright or gifted soldiers, but only because they satisfy Christian eschatological fantasies, as is sometimes seen in modern Evangelical Christian enthusiasm for the state of Israel). However, there is no need to court controversy on the hyphenation point in our present study, so we will retain the spelling 'antisemitism'. I will conclude my discussion of



method with a quotation from Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (2010, 1–2), which is relevant for two reasons: 1) it reassures the reader that while debate over terminology has its place, so too does gut feeling; 2) it provides some useful thinking points on how Jew-hatred is acquired:

There are those who report that they know antisemitism when they see it, much as with pornography, even if they find it difficult to pin down with words the nature of their recognition. The comparison with pornography is suggestive in that some believe the mere viewing of it to be dangerously corrupting, whereas others believe that it is the already corrupt personalities (or dangerous tendencies in all personalities) that are attracted to pornography. Some, in turn, see antisemitic ideas as mysteriously potent, dangerously corrupting those who have contact with them; others believe simply that already corrupt personalities are attracted to antisemitic ideas.

## Method and Microhistory

The first problem when metaphorically disturbing Tidericus's unmarked grave is the extreme paucity of the sources. This lack is all the more frustrating because of the inverse correlation between the amount of material accessible to the researcher and the sheer drama of the original events. As we are confronted with such micro-sources, this study will be an exercise in microhistory, or at least a species thereof. Following the definitions of microhistory laid out by Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István Szijártó (2013, esp. 6–7, 16–18), the approach here will be to offer a vantage point on a very substantial and complex assemblage of historical processes (the Black Death, the rise of Hanseatic traders in Scandinavia, the long development of medieval Judaeophobia) 'from the inside' by examining the deaths of just nine individuals in a particular place, at a particular time. However, there are a number of unavoidable limitations on this investigation. Most importantly, the sources available to us are far more limited than those in any of the studies surveyed by Sigurður and Szijártó. This makes the present study much more reliant on deduction and supposition than the kind of microhistory popularised by Carlo Ginzburg. Describing his aims in *The Cheese and the Worms*, Ginzburg writes: 'I had set out to reconstruct the intellectual, moral, and fantastic world of the miller Menocchio on the basis of sources produced by persons who had sent him to the stake' (1980, 204). On the basis of our brief Hanseatic documents, we cannot possibly hope to do the same for Tidericus. But we can invert Ginzburg's model. We can interrogate the mentalities and motivations of two other involved parties: both the administrators who orchestrated his death, and the ordinary Visbyers

amongst whom he lived, and before whom he died. We know what they did, why they claimed they did it, and where Ginzburg had inventories of Menocchio's books, we have some of the sermons, artworks and legends that would most likely have been circulating on medieval Gotland.

Working solely from such sources, Ginzburg (1980, xv) protests that 'it is absurd to equate "the culture produced by the popular classes" [e.g. ballads, vernacular prose narratives] with "the culture imposed on the masses" [e.g. Old Swedish preaching material]'. In a relatively source-rich situation, such as that of Menocchio the Miller (d. 1599), an exclusive focus on 'the culture imposed on the masses' would be myopic. In the exceedingly source-poor situation of Tidericus the *organista*, however, such a limited focus is a reluctant necessity. When it comes to well-poisonings or Jews, the central fixtures in the fantasy we wish to examine, virtually nothing has been preserved from the secular canon (e.g. folklore, ballads, popular incunabula) of pre-1500 Sweden and Gotland.<sup>10</sup> Without access to relevant sources which might have been shaped beyond the reach of church and state, our first recourse must be to examine the ideas which were apparently conveyed 'top-down'. It will be my contention that Letters A and B demonstrate the message the ruling élite in Visby were hoping to convey to Low-German-speaking Visbyers (in the case of A) and Gutnish-speaking Visbyers (in the case of B). We can also mine the Old Swedish preaching and *miraculum* traditions for examples of the sort of thinking about Jews which might well have been circulating through Church culture. In the absence of any textual evidence of the Gotlandic laity's feelings about the supposed plot, or indeed their own ideas about Jews, we will have to rely on deduction to ascertain the degree to which these 'top-down' artefacts were accepted or resisted. The central question in this deduction will be whether there are any signs of social unrest following the arrival of the plague and the death of Tidericus and the others, or conversely, whether the accusations against Tidericus *et al.* and their subsequent public execution appear to have contributed to the maintenance of the status quo under difficult circumstances. Put simply, our method will be 1) to suggest a purpose behind the Visby allegations in the minds of the Hansards, and 2) to evaluate the effectiveness of the allegations in realising their purpose.

Another necessary question when apprehending our sources is to consider whether they treat real events at all. Were Tidericus and the

<sup>10</sup> A limited amount of folklore concerning the Wandering Jew is known from Sweden, but to connect this scant tradition to the events of 1350 is not feasible (Cole 2015d, 218–19).

others really burnt at the stake? Did they even exist? Are the events of 1350 so scantily recorded because the whole episode was just a fiction told by one group of Hanseatic administrators to another? A platitude to demonstrate that the terrifying plague was something that could be understood and controlled on the same terms and by the same means as in other European towns? This possibility can be discredited at the outset, however. Although probably bested by the earlier vikings, roving across the Atlantic and all the way across Asia to Baghdad and Byzantium, the Hansards belonged to one of the most mobile demographics in medieval northern Europe. Personnel frequently moved between trading posts and maintained a mercantile bureaucracy which gave them wide-reaching surveillance over the League's interests. In light of the great likelihood that any untruths would have been discovered, to fabricate events as dramatic as these would be a very grave risk for any career-minded Hanseatic councillor. The modern historian may struggle to know what was happening in Hanseatic affairs in the fourteenth century, but fourteenth-century Hansards certainly did not.

## CHAPTER ONE

### GOTLAND AND VISBY DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

To some extent, Gotland is a curious mirror image of Iceland. Both are islands whose histories are entwined with the mainland, but which maintain a distinct cultural identity. Iceland began its political history as an assembly republic, independent of Norway. Gotland began its political history as an assembly republic, independent of Sweden. Both islands would later become subject to their larger, mainland neighbours, and later still both would become subject to Denmark in the time of the Kalmar Union. Both islands had their own languages, which were in linguistic terms surprisingly conservative. Icelandic largely preserves the grammar and vocabulary of Old West Norse. Old Gutnish, the language of Gotland, largely preserved the grammar and vocabulary of Old East Norse, but with a phonology all of its own that has sometimes left researchers pointing hesitantly to some sort of relationship with Gothic.<sup>1</sup> Some heterodoxy on how one ought to define ‘Scandinavia’ notwithstanding, Iceland is the furthest western point in Scandinavia, and Gotland the furthest to the east. Despite this distance, a historian or philologist who can read Old Icelandic will find Old Gutnish uncannily legible, even though there can have been scarcely any traffic between them during the Middle Ages.

But there is one crucial difference between the two islands. While Iceland would not see urbanisation until the modern period, Gotland developed a city during the Middle Ages: Visby. Most likely, it began as a market settlement, perhaps not unlike Birka in Sweden or Hedeby in Denmark. Gotland’s position in the Baltic makes it an ideal base for journeys between Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Livonian coast and Russia. But while Hedeby and Birka faded into obscurity at the end of the Viking Age, Visby’s accessibility by sea and its position on an arterial trade route caused the city to flourish. The eleventh century seems to have seen conflict between Gotlandic and German merchants, vying for supremacy in the Baltic.<sup>2</sup> The bellicose Gotlanders were a direct

<sup>1</sup> An overview is provided by Peel (1999, xxxi, lvii). Specifically, see Bugge 1895, 153–58; Bugge 1907, 98–101.

<sup>2</sup> The following background on Gotland is taken from Philippe 1970, 24–35.

continuation of the viking trading tradition, while the north German traders represented a new sort of merchant. They travelled in cogs rather than longships, and preferred companies and institutions to the individualism of the vikings. In 1161 Duke Henry the Lion of Saxony instigated a peace accord between the competing parties, and merchants from north German towns gained the right to settle in Visby. While rural Gotland continued to be an agrarian society, ruled by local magnates and assemblies, Visby began to take on the character of a bustling north German city. This divergence became a political fissure. As will be seen, Visby became essentially self-governing, with a population divided between Low German-speakers (either recent arrivals from the continent, or native to the city for multiple generations), and Gutnish-speakers. The former demographic generally looked to Lübeck and the other Hanseatic cities as their natural neighbours. The latter looked to the countryside, which was growing increasingly resentful of the urban élite.

### ***‘Utriusque Linguae’: Relations between Germans and Gotlanders approaching 1350***

Several centuries before the rise of National Romanticism, the Middle Ages had already construed language as a divisive fixture in personal identity. This is not to detract from the ostensible cosmopolitanism of medieval Christendom. From the distant outpost of Greenland to Rome itself, there was one Church, where devotional practice was more or less universal and liturgy was conducted entirely in one language, namely Latin (admittedly interspersed with Greek and Hebrew phrases). There were too a number of polities which were for the most part equitably multi-lingual and multi-ethnic, e.g. the Norman Kingdom of Sicily, the Kingdom of Man and the Isles. But practical considerations often led to divisions along the lines of language. For example, while liturgy was universally in Latin, preaching was best undertaken in the vernacular. Thus, people submitting to the same crown, and belonging to the same faith, tended to belong to separate congregations according to their mother tongue. Similar divisions were necessary in matters of administration. Members of political bodies such as guilds or town councils needed to be of one language in order to operate effectively. Linguistic diversity was not only a mundanely pragmatic concern. As Robert Bartlett (2001, 49) points out, ‘for some medieval thinkers languages were indeed even more important parts of the human dispensation than races’. Rulers occasionally asserted legitimacy over their subjects on grounds of shared language (alongside other factors; see Bartlett 2001, 53–54).

Gotland provides an interesting example of two communities speaking different languages living alongside one another during the Middle Ages. It is important to note at the outset that the indigenous Scandinavian language of the island, Old Gutnish, was mutually intelligible with Old Swedish but very much a discrete language in its own right. Gutnish would have been the language of the countryside, while in the Hanseatic city of Visby there was also a large and politically powerful German-speaking population. The German-speaking population would have comprised the Hansards, sometimes their families, and some accompanying itinerant workers and artisans who made a living providing services that native Gotlanders could not. The average population of medieval Visby has been estimated at somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000, and the German contingent thereof must have been sizeable—enough to produce a population surfeit of German Gotlanders, who colonised Riga and Tallinn during the thirteenth century (Fenger 1993, 606). Gustaf Lindström (1892, 444) suggested that Visby was probably *mer än hälften tysk* ‘more than half German’. While we cannot know the exact proportions, indigenous Gutnish speakers continued to live in the city in appreciable numbers. Scandinavian names appears in diplomatic sources throughout the period of Hanseatic domination. Gutnish runic inscriptions in or around Visby throughout the Middle Ages testify to the ongoing presence of Gutnish speakers both in the city proper and in its immediate environs.<sup>3</sup>

The German- and Gutnish-speaking populations of Visby were demarcated by their differing languages, but they were not living in parallel worlds. German migration to Visby was not a sudden precipitation that instantly necessitated new political institutions. Indeed, there was a unified city council which purported to represent the native Gotlanders and German-speaking immigrants alike (Yrwing 1989, 39). Towards the end of the thirteenth and into the first half of the fourteenth century, however, documentary sources strongly suggest that the two language communities, while operating one government, were seeking to express their identities independently. A letter from the 26th October 1280 was written on behalf of *consules & commune civitatis Wysbicensis tam Theotonicorum, quam Guttensium* ‘the councillors

<sup>3</sup> From or pertaining to Visby proper, see G 100, G 352, and G 392. From the home counties adjoining Visby, see G 249, G 250, G 251, G 258, G 259, G 260, G 261, G 262, G 263. Accessed on Rundata 3.1. Available online at <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>

and whole city of Visby, the Germans just as much as the Gotlanders' (*DipS* 1, 729 [DS (*Diplomatarium Suecanum*) no. 884, SDHK (Svenskt Diplomatariums huvudkartotek över medeltidsbreven) no. 1158]). In 1286, 1288, 1294, 1317 and 1318, five more letters were written that employed the formula *tam Theotonicorum quam Guttensium* (Yrwing 1989, 40–41). From 1320 onwards, a stylistic shift becomes apparent. A letter from the 9th August of that year announces that it is from *Consules Vysbicenses vtriusque lingue* 'The Councillors of Visby of both languages' (*DipS* 3, 470 [DS 2250, SDHK 3012]). As far as we can see from surviving sources, this new formula supplanted its predecessor entirely, and is attested again in correspondence from 1333, 1344 and 1351. After 1351 there are no further attempts by Visby's Hanseatic administrators to articulate the linguistic cleavage of their town; two letters from 1353 are signed simply *consules in Wisby Gotlandie* 'the councillors of Visby in Gotland' (*DipS* 6, 453 [DS 4958, SDHK 6632], 448 [DS 4951, SDHK 6623]).

The relationship of these formal distinctions to the quotidian functioning of the city council cannot be ascertained with absolute certainty, but there are some plausible deductions to be made from other contexts. For example, we know that most of the wealthy élite in Visby were German speakers. With a few exceptions such as one Botref and one Botviþr from St Clement's church, the vast majority of high-status graves in the city belong to people with German rather than Scandinavian names (see Hamner and Wideén 1940, 55–56; Lindström 1892, 507). Last wills and testaments from Visby are also overwhelmingly in German. Moreover, apart from the cursory gestures to being of *utriusque linguae*, there are, to my knowledge, no surviving documents where the councillors of Visby mention any native Gotlandic concerns: the focus is always on the merchants. This silence in no way implies that the appellations towards *Theotonicorum quam Guttensium* were fraudulent; if Gutnish speakers had been quietly prohibited from the council there would have been none of the aforementioned wrangling over how to self-designate (Wubs-Mrozewicz 2004, 56–57; we should note for context's sake that in neighbouring Sweden by c.1350 the equal representation of Swedish speakers and German speakers in Hanseatic administrations was also a concern). It appears most likely that the dynamics of the city council by the middle of the fourteenth century were such that German-speaking members of the council dealt with concerns pertinent to the German-speaking population. In effect, this would have meant that the more

serious business of trade and diplomacy was more or less a German-speaking dominion. Gutnish speakers were present on the council, but as most of the rich and powerful were German speakers, the Gutnish input was probably restricted to mundane, domestic affairs which were only of concern to the largely impotent Gutnish-speaking population, such as overseeing migration from rural Gotland proper to urban Visby and receiving complaints from common Gutnish speakers. These sorts of administrative tasks would have generated much less paperwork, and what there was would have been less important to preserve than anything pertaining to trade, explaining their silence in the surviving sources. The *consules Guttensium* were likely to have been as marginalised within the council as the ordinary Gutnish speakers were in the city as a whole.

From the names of known donors to respective churches, gravestones and diplomatic evidence, scholars have been able to identify the primary linguistic affiliations of the various congregations in medieval Visby. The caveat is necessary that these divisions would not have been absolute. By 1350, Gutnish speakers and German speakers had been living alongside each other for over a century. Some citizens would have had mixed ancestry. Others would have acquired the German or Gutnish language because it was more appropriate to the professional or personal circles in which they moved. For example, a native Gotlander who became successful as a merchant would have been well served by learning German and joining a German-speaking congregation. Conversely, a simple shopkeeper of German ancestry would have benefitted from knowing at least a little Gutnish when communicating with his customers. It should also be borne in mind that stratifications of class bisected the linguistic communities of Visby. Most of the wealthy denizens of Visby were German-speaking, but it was not the case that German heritage was a universal indicator of wealth and that the lower classes were entirely Gotlandic. A good example of the intricacies of class and language in the congregations of mid-fourteenth-century Visby is provided by the church at which Tidericus and the two ‘priests’ appear to have sometimes officiated at services, namely, St Olaf’s.

From its dedication, St Olaf’s might well be expected to have had a Scandinavian congregation. St Olaf’s was, of course, a prominent Scandinavian saint cult. Of particular import in a Gotlandic context, we should note that St Olaf, a Norwegian, makes a pointed appearance in *Guta saga* (1220–75), the Old Gutnish vernacular history of Gotland. He appears immediately after the section where the Gotlanders establish



their treaty with the Swedish crown, submitting to Sweden but doing so in a pragmatic and self-assured manner, keen to maintain a distinct identity (*Gus*, 6):

So gingu gutar sielfs viliandi undir suia kunung . . . Þair sendibúðar aigu friþ lyssa gutum alla steþi til sykia yfir haf, sum Upsala kunungi til hoyrir, ok so þair, sum þan vegin aigu hinget sykia.

Thus, the Gotlanders themselves willingly submitted to the King of the Swedes . . . Those emissaries (of the king) are obliged to declare the freedom of the Gotlanders to visit all places across the seas which belong to the king at Uppsala, just as those (from Sweden) who visit here (my translation).

As though to emphasise Gotland's independence as a Swedish dominion, the anonymous author of *Guta saga* depicts Gotland's first Christian converts being influenced by Norwegian rather than Swedish missionaries. It is also worth noting that the first Gotlandic Christian, Ormika of Hejnum, takes part in a gift-giving exchange with St Olaf in which he receives the symbol of the Saint's cult, the axe (*Gus*, 8):

Eptir þet sípan quam helgi Olafur kunungr flyandi af Norvegi miþ skipum ok legþis i hamn, þa sum kallar Akergarn. Þar la helgi Olafur lengi. Þa for Ormika af Hainaim ok flairi rikir menn til hans miþ giefum sinum. Þann Ormika gaf honum tolf veþru miþ andrum klenatum. Þa gaf Olafur kunungr hanum atr agin tua bulla ok aina braiþyxi. Þa tok Ormika viþr kristindomi eptir helga Olafs kennidomi ok gierþi sir bynahus i sama staþ, sum nu standr Akergarna kirkia.

After that Holy King Olaf arrived, fleeing Norway with his ships, and put in at the harbour called Akergarn. St Olaf stayed there for a long time. Then Ormika of Hejnum and several powerful men went to him with gifts. This Ormika gave him twelve rams along with other riches. Then King Olaf gave him in return two goblets and a stout axe. Then Ormika accepted Christianity according to St Olaf's teaching and erected his chapel at the place where the church at Akergarn now stands.

Despite the strong Scandinavian connotations of his cult, the church of St Olaf in Visby was actually a German-speaking church, having been built for a German congregation around 1240 (Wase 2010, 204–05). The attested priests of the church consistently had German names: *Johannes* (1316), *Heyno* (1393) and *Gerdt Munter* (1482), until the more Swedish sounding *Oloff* in 1485 (Lindström 1892, 419). It cannot be discounted that some Gutnish speakers, out of fervour in venerating St Olaf, may have stubbornly attended the church despite not being able to understand much of the preaching, but here we can only conjecture. The linguistic identity of St Olaf's was apparently German from the outset, and

remained so long into the Middle Ages. Its class identity, on the other hand, has been the subject of some debate. Gunnar Svahnström (1971, 35) argued that

Kyrkans relativt stora mått—i jämförbara delar var den föga mindre än de äldsta Mariakyrkan—och dess tydliga mycket påkostade dekorativa utsmyckning ger vid handen, att den hört till de mera betydande i den äldre medeltidens Visby.

The church's relatively large dimensions—in certain comparable places it was only a little smaller than the oldest Church of St Mary—and its apparently very expensive decorative embellishments suggest that it belonged to the more significant people in older medieval Visby.

Dick Wase (2010, 204–05) has contradicted this position. He notes that three *borgararistokrati* are named as giving money to the church:

Som t ex Albert Bintop 1387, Aren Zaffenberg och Gerhard Ruggenben 1393. Men låg taxusavgift och få omnämnanden i testamenten indikerar låg social status. De flesta i det trähusområde som låg i nuvarande botaniska trädgården torde ha haft sankt Olof som sin kyrka.

e.g. Albert Bintop, 1387, Aren Zaffenberg and Gerhard Ruggenben 1393. But the low tax burden and few mentions in wills indicate low social status. Most people in the district of wooden houses which lay beneath the site of the present-day Botanical Gardens would have had Saint Olaf's as their church.

Corinne Péneau (2009, 71–102), following Wase, hypothesises that the congregation at St Olaf's would have been the tradesmen and *petits gens* who served the Hanseatic élite.

I find these arguments based on finances and location more reliable than architectural indicators. For example, in 1365 the Church of the Holy Ghost garnered 100 Lübecker marks from wills, receiving ten for every leper in its care. St Olaf's received just two marks *in toto* for any purpose. Throughout the Middle Ages the church benefitted from just four bequests, amounting to eighteen Lübecker shillings, twelve Gotlandic silver marks and three Lübecker marks. By the time of Tidericus's death in 1350, the church had not been mentioned once in any surviving will, while wealthier congregations such as the Church of the Holy Ghost or St Mary's were receiving regular bequests every few years (Lindström 1892, 376–83). St Olaf's may well have been well-appointed when it was first consecrated, as Svahnström argued, but it seems that its initial prosperity could not be sustained by its humble congregation living in wooden homes in a city otherwise famed for its high proportion of stone houses (Andersson 2003, 338).

While it should be stressed that there was apparently a German-speaking proletariat,<sup>4</sup> and that St Olaf's was their church, it must be noted that the lowest of the low—one might even say the *Lumpenproletariat*—were Gutnish speakers. The largely Gutnish-speaking church of St Michael was synonymous with social deprivation.<sup>5</sup> According to Bishop Jöran Wallin (d. 1760), summarising a now lost manuscript by Nicolaus Petreius (d. 1579), *denna kyrkan varit för Skökor allena, och at de med sina illa förmerfwade medel byggt henne op, och helgat henna S. Michel såsom sin Patron och försvarare* 'this church had been strictly for harlots, and with their evilly attained wealth they built it up, and venerated St Michael as their patron and defender' (GS, 261). There has obviously been some hyperbolic distortion over the passage of time here—not everyone in the congregation can have been a sex worker—but Petreius's postmedieval characterisation of the church as being particularly attended by the poor has subsequently been supported by archaeological investigation. As Waldemar Falck (1979, 229) notes, it was built quite close to the city wall compared to the other medieval churches, which were more centrally located. Similarly, Jonas Lindkvist's investigations into human remains from the church indicated that in many, though not all, cases the tested persons had consumed a diet consistent with that of a lower-class Visbyer (Lindkvist 2008, 9–10, 31–32). The archaeological and anecdotal evidence is finally supported by evidence from donations to the church, or the lack thereof. Between 1269 and 1500 St Michael's received just eighteen Lübecker shillings, twelve Gotlandic silver marks and two Lübecker marks; a little less than St Olaf's.

<sup>4</sup> In the context of medieval Visby, I use the word 'proletariat' as a convenient term for people who 1) generally belonged to the lower orders of society, 2) operated in an urban, cash economy, 3) mostly sold their labour as opposed to selling products or collecting rents, although importantly some less wealthy artisans are included here. In this way, a cobbler, a cordwainer's assistant, a sex worker, a brewer earning only subsistence capital, an urban weaver as found in German cities (opposed to the rural cottage weaver), etc. are all included under one term. This is a loosening of Marx's definition, which would not have admitted artisans and would normally be used in an industrial context (Marx 1990, 270–72; Marx and Engels 2008, 5–12). Hilton flirts with the term in a peasant setting (1990, 78) and also provides examples of what we might think of as urban subsistence brewing (24–25, 28–29, 38). Others use 'proletariat' in a sense approximating mine (Gimpel 1976, 99, 213; Postan 1950, 223; Mielants 2000, esp. 263).

<sup>5</sup> By the time that named personnel are attested in the fifteenth century, the church was coming under German influence, e.g. the priests *Herman* (1485–87) and *Henrik Degener* (d. 1447). There is no reason to suspect that this process had begun or was very far advanced in Tidericus's day. See Lindström 1892, 421; Hamner and Wideén 1940, 102.

<b>Church name</b>	<b>Primary linguistic/ethnic affiliation, and class affiliation (where known) <sup>1</sup></b>
Church of the Holy Ghost	Danish
Solberga Convent Church	Cistercian convent. Probably mixed German and Gotlandic
St Catherine's	Attached to the Franciscan convent. Mostly German
St Clement's	Mostly wealthy Gotlanders, a few Germans
St Gertrude's	Cistercian nunnery. Founded by Gotlanders
St James's	Livonian
St John's	Originally Gotlandic. Mixed Gotlandic and German by 1350
St Lawrence's	Gotlandic
St Michael's	Gotlandic, lower-class
St Nicholas's	Gotlandic, moving towards German influence c.1340s
St Olaf's	German
St Peter's	German
Cathedral of St Mary	One congregation for each language community
The Lord's (Holy Trinity)	German, upper-class
The Russian Church	Russian

**Figure 1.** The congregations of Visby by 1350

While social and linguistic barriers in medieval Visby were always somewhat blurred and permeable, it is still broadly acceptable to characterise the élite as German-speaking, most of the Gutnish-speaking population as disenfranchised and financially insecure, and there being, in a sense, two proletariats coexisting, one German and one native Gotlandic. How harmonious relations were between these intersecting interests will be of relevance to understanding the web in which Tidericus and the others were caught in the summer of 1350. There was obviously animosity between the German-dominated city and the Gutnish-speaking hinterland. Anders Andrén (1989, 597) notes that ‘the town wall of Visby was expressively erected against a hostile countryside in the 1280s’. In 1288 open warfare erupted between the rural Gotlanders and the Visbyers. The Swedish King Magnus Ladulås sent troops to support the Gotlanders, who also received reinforcements from Courland, Estonia and the Teutonic Order. Despite these foreign interventions, the Visbyers

were victorious. Eleven years after Tidericus's death, in 1361, the city of Visby would close its gates as the Danish King Valdemar Atterdag approached. The bodies of women, as well as minors and the elderly, have been identified from the mass graves filled by those who were slaughtered that day (Andersson 1926, 405; caution on the identification of women amongst the slain is however urged by Thordeman 1944, 128–29). The legend that the Visbyers sealed the city gates while the Danes fell upon the rural Gotlanders who had fled to the city for protection thus seems eminently believable. How all this history affected the Gutnish-speaking Visbyers is hard to say with certainty, although there is room for reasonable conjecture. Bengt Thordeman (1944, 30) characterised unrest in medieval Gotland as a conflict between three elements: the rural Gotlanders, the Gutnish-speaking Visbyers and the German-speaking Visbyers. Bisections of class were probably also important, however. A German speaker, whether affluent or indigent, would have felt no inclination to be ruled by the farmers of the Gotlandic countryside. Gutnish-speaking Visbyers were most likely divided. Successful men such as Botref and Botviþr probably recognised that their interests were best served by the German-speaking hegemony. It gave them access to the Hanseatic trade network, and in any case they would have had little reason to suppose that their rustic fellow Gutnish speakers could have administered a sophisticated conurbation such as Visby better than the German urbanite newcomers. Lower-class Gutnish-speaking Visbyers, on the other hand, may well have felt more ambivalent. Many of the men who attempted to capture Visby in 1288 would probably have been their cousins, perhaps even brothers. The same is true of the men, women and children who died outside the gates in 1361, either clamouring for shelter or as soldiers in the peasant militia who fell vainly resisting King Valdemar, eleven years after Tidericus's death. For people like those who made up the congregation of St Michael's, life in Visby must at times have felt like what today we would recognise as a colonial experience. Living in the city was surely preferable to life in the countryside, but it came at the cost of submission to an administration with which they did not identify, and which had little interest in their well-being. This is the fractured social backdrop in front of which Tidericus would burn.

### **The Absence of Jews in Gotland**

While setting out the basic circumstances on Gotland immediately prior to Tidericus's death, we should briefly return to the question of Jewish absence. As imaginary Jewish poisoners were so important to the fantasy

that was his undoing, a few words are required on the prospect of ‘real Jews’ on the island. The strong connection to Lübeck and Rostock in fourteenth-century Visby would probably have precluded Jewish settlement there. Lübeck, the capital of the Hanseatic league, did not permit Jews within its walls until the seventeenth century (Rothschild and Daemmig 2007, 252). This is consistent with the general hostility towards Jews in maritime northern Germany during the period. To quote Salo Baron (1960, 339): ‘Rostock shared its relative aloofness [towards Jews] with many Hanseatic cities, whether or not they were members of the Hanseatic League.’ It appears unlikely that the German-speaking contingent of the administration in Visby would have had any inclination to establish a Jewry in the city. Similarly, the Gutnish speakers would have lacked the necessary connections to established Jewish settlements elsewhere in Europe, even if they had hypothetically been minded to invite Jews to immigrate.



**Figure 2.** Carl Gustaf Hellqvist. *Valdemar Atterdag brandskattar Visby*, 1882, oil on canvas, 2 x 3.3m, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. Note the Jew with *pileus cornutus*, red badge and *tallit*, bottom right.

There have been some suggestions of a Jewish presence in medieval Visby over the years. Dick Wase pointed to a will from 1358, left by one Nicolaus van Hachede, a German-speaking Visbyer. In it he leaves ten marks to *Jacob, der die Tochter der Jüdin Heze hat* ‘Jacob, who is married to the daughter of Heze the Jewess’ (RLBM, vol. 2, 180; Wase 2010, 149–51). However, as Adams (2013, 6–7) points out in his

evaluation of Jewish presence in nearby medieval Denmark, ‘Jew’ could also be a mocking byname given to a gentile by other gentiles. Indeed, even if Heze were of Jewish extraction, she may well have belonged to the German wing of Nicolaus’s family, and never have set foot in Visby. We cannot know. Wase (2010, 149–51) also points to an exporter in Visby from 1475 by the name of Vitusz and the recurrence of the name Solomon in the Hude family line (a prominent Gotlandic lineage) as possible indicators of Jewish background amongst medieval Visbyers. However, I do not find either of these suggestions compelling. Vitus was a common enough name for Christians. Solomon, like Moses or Aaron, was much more popular amongst Jews than Christians, but on the other hand, for the Hude family to keep bestowing it upon their children would be a fairly bold advertisement of their faith and/or heritage. It seems unlikely that an openly Jewish family could have achieved the prominence that they did without attracting hostility from the Lübeck-aligned ruling class.<sup>6</sup> A non-scholarly assumption of a Jewish presence close to 1350 is Carl Gustaf Hellqvist’s depiction of King Valdemar’s plunder of Visby in 1361 (see fig. 2). This is an arresting image, particularly as there is no evidence of Jewish settlement anywhere in Scandinavia before the Early Modern period (Berulfsen 1963, col. 77; Trachtenberg 1966, 104). Hellqvist’s Jewish figure is thus perhaps an attempt to render Visby exotic, or maybe demonstrative of a crude association between Jews and money. Regardless, there is no reason to impute any historical reality to it.

### The plague in Visby

The Black Death appears to have reached Visby by the late autumn of 1349 (Benedictow 2004, 198–99). The Hanseatic trade network is the most likely route of transmission, although it is impossible to say precisely whence the first contaminated persons, goods and vermin came. By 1349 outbreaks were known in England, Northern Germany and Norway, all areas with which Visby’s Hansards would have had dealings.<sup>7</sup> Norway appears to have been contaminated before Sweden,

<sup>6</sup> On the prospects for Jewish settlement in Visby, and the much better case of a Jewish visitor to Bergen in 1350, see Cole 2015c, 17–21.

<sup>7</sup> One Icelandic account of the 1349 outbreak highlights the acknowledgement of maritime trade as a vector of plague infection. It also demonstrates just how apocalyptic the plague appeared from the outside (Iceland was spared on this occasion, and did not fall victim itself until 1402): *J þenna tíma kom drepsott sua mikil vm alla norðr halfuna at alldri kom slið fyrri síðan londin bugduz . . .*



which had apparently not yet been infected by October of 1349, but the Swedish King Magnus Eriksson (r. 1317–74) was aware that its arrival was imminent (Vahtola 2003, 564; Benedictow 2004, 160–62, 170–78). In a decree of that year Magnus wrote forebodingly that

Gud för menniskiona synda skvll haffuer eno stoora plago almenneliga kastat aa verldena med braadöda, swa at mestha lothrin aff ty folk, som var i thera landom, som vesthan vor land liggjande ärw, vtaff the plaagana dööd oc staar nw omkring alt Norge oc Halland oc naakas nu hiit, swaa at, huart man spöör ther omkring, tha staar swa starkelika at vthan alla sott faller folket nider . . . alt sender at thet är helbrögda oc döör vthen allan redzskap oc formale. (*DipS* 6, 156 [DS 4515, SDHK 5702])

God for the sake of the sins of humanity has universally cast a great plague on the world with sudden death, so that the greatest part of those people who were in those countries lying to the west of our country have died of the plague, and it is now all around Norway and Halland and now approaches here, for if one inquires thereabouts then it strongly appears that without any [other] illness people fall down dead. Everything indicates that one is healthy and then dies without any reason and cause.

The plague must have claimed high death-tolls in all the Scandinavian countries where it struck. From a Pan-Scandinavian perspective reliable numbers are difficult to obtain, as are metrics which can be easily transposed across the three kingdoms in order to adduce mortality rates. For example, farm desertion was far more calamitous in Norway than it was in Denmark, even though Norway was a highly agrarian society (the sort which generally saw lower mortality rates) while Denmark had

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*síþan for hon vm Franka ríki ok vm Saxland ok sua til Englandz ok eyddi næliga allt England ok þat til marks at ei lifði meirr eftir i borginni Lundunum enn .xiiij. menn. [J] þann tíð sigldi kuggr einn af Englandi ok var a mart folk ok lagdi inn við Björgyniar vog ok var lítt ruddr. [S]íðan andadiz folkit allt af skipinu. [E]nn þegar vpp kom gozit i bynn a[ð] skipinu þa dó þegar beiarfolkit. [P]a fór sottin vm allann Noreg og eyddi sua at eigi lifði eftir einn þrídungr folksins i landinu. ‘At that time a mortal illness came all around the northern region, so great that such had never come since the countries were settled . . . then it went around France and around Germany and so to England, and nearly destroyed all of England to the extent that no more than fourteen people lived in the city of London any more. At that time a certain cog sailed from England and there were many people on it, and it put in at Bergen harbour and was unloaded a little. Then all the people from the ship died. And when the goods came into the town from the ship then the townsfolk died at once. Then the sickness went all around Norway and laid waste so that afterwards not a third of the people in the country were alive’ (*Flateyjarannáll*, in *Ann*, 403–04).*



a relatively urbanised society (the sort which generally saw much higher mortality rates, see Bagge 2014, 232–36; on the varying sources and metrics, see Myrdal 2006, 144–52). Nonetheless, by any reckoning the impact on Visby appears to have been dramatic. For example, Myrdal (2003, 57) notes that the Visbyer *Diarum fratrum minorum Visbyensium* records five deaths in 1349, compared to 111 in 1350. For Gotland in general and Visby in particular, gravestones are also a revealing source (elsewhere in Scandinavia this is not the case, with few gravestones surviving from the fourteenth century in many areas). Myrdal (2003, 63), reproducing unpublished findings by Wase, notes that three Gotlandic gravestones survive from 1348, none from 1349 and sixteen from 1350. Considering that the *Diarum* would have recorded only the deaths of people known to the Franciscans in Visby, and that the surviving gravestones record only the deaths of those wealthy enough to be commemorated with the sort of high-quality stones which can remain legible for centuries, it is logical that the mortality rate must have been far higher. The area inside Visby's 2.14 mile-long stone wall was roughly 0.21 square miles, and with an estimated population of c.5000–10,000, conditions for many residents must have been cramped. The splendid stone buildings which today stand either intact or as ruins are a sign of Visby's material wealth compared to other medieval Scandinavian towns, but amongst the narrow passages and tightly-packed wooden houses, particularly those which we have seen in the vicinity of St Olaf's, the plague would have found a perfect environment.

How far advanced the plague was in Visby by the time of Tidericus's death is uncertain. It is incontestable that 1350 was a year of great mortality in the city, but a year is a long time for a disease with an incubation period of a week or less, and which can kill in fifty-six hours (Walløe 2008, 59–73; assuming one accepts that the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* was the chief cause of plague in Scandinavia, a debate upon which we need not intrude here). Myrdal (2006, 166) is sceptical that many had actually died by the 2nd July.<sup>8</sup> Rather, he interprets the accusations against Tidericus and company as a panic rooted in awareness that the plague was relentlessly heading in Gotland's direction, an awareness perhaps not wholly unlike that of King Magnus cited previously:

The first evidence from Sweden is a single case from the spring of 1350 on Gotland in the Baltic. (It was connected with pogroms against travellers

<sup>8</sup> Myrdal has elsewhere (2003, 153) described Visby in the May of 1350 as an *uppflammande* 'flare-up' of the plague, presumably presaging the autumnal peak, rather than being pure panic without deaths from infection.

accused of working for Jews—a sign of rumours and fear.) But the real outbreak came in the late summer and early autumn . . . In mid-Jutland the plague struck hardest in August to September, in inland southern Sweden (Småland) in September, and along the Baltic coast (Gotland and Uppland) from September to October.

The question of the death-toll during the summer of 1350 is largely immaterial to the present study, as we are mostly concerned with the mechanics of what ideological trends made the fantasy amenable to the Gutnish-speaking Visbyers, and what social pressures prompted the executions. Whether those pressures came from actual fatalities or the threat of impending fatalities does not affect my analysis. Nonetheless, somewhat contrary to Myrdal's assessment, it should be stressed that Letter B states that quite a few more than one or two individuals had already died.<sup>9</sup>

Idem fatebatur, quod feria secunda Penthecostes, cum missam celebraret in ecclesia sancti Olavi nobiscum, mapulam, quam ad hoc officium peragendum habuit, veneficiis intoxicavit, ita ut omnes in offertorio ipsam osculantes tercia die fuerunt mortui aut quarta et similiter omnes ipsos visitantes. Quare scientes, quod plebanus eiusdem ecclesie et tres alii sacerdotes et plurimi sacerdotes et plurimi alii nostri concives breviter sunt mortui de eodem, et commemorantes omnes et conversantes moriebantur cum eisdem, et, ut dixerunt, experti sumus, proch dolor, hoc in toto.

He [a 'priest' amongst the accused] admitted that on the second day of Pentecost, when he was celebrating the mass in the church of St Olaf here, he had spiked with poison the maniple which he used to perform the service, so that three or four days later all those who kissed the offertory went to their graves, as did those who came to see them. Thus we know how the congregation of this church, three other priests and a great many of our fellow citizens were killed so quickly by this sickness, and everyone who lived with them or spent time with them died with them. And so, much to our anguish, the evidence shows that everything they [the accused] said was true.

Letter B is obviously far from being a dispassionate account of events, but even here it is acknowledged that the disease has spread beyond any sort of localised containment, i.e. although a particular church congregation was the intended victim of a 'poisoning', people were dying who were not themselves members of the congregation. On this point, Letter B has the ring of truth, where a modern reader can see beyond the accusation of wilful poisoning and recognise what is obviously bacterial contagion

<sup>9</sup> The emendations made to this passage by editors are enumerated and discussed below.

at work. Those who volunteered to care for the sick would be exposed to the disease more often, and so faced greater risks of mortality, which perhaps also explains the death of the three ‘poisoned’ priests (Myrdal 2003, 57; although in general the monks of Visby appear to have suffered a risk ten times greater than did the parish priests). It may well be true, as Myrdal surmises, that plague mortality in Visby would not reach its apex until the early autumn of 1350. It would appear, however, that amongst the lower social strata of Visby, such as the flock at St Olaf’s, fatalities had begun several months earlier. This interpretation would accord with Benedictow’s observation of ‘supermortality’ (i.e. increased relative susceptibility to plague) amongst the proletariat, particularly as the poorer citizens of Visby are wholly invisible in the *Diarum* and the gravestone records (Benedictow 2004, esp. 264–66).<sup>10</sup> That Visby’s plague deaths should have begun in earnest somewhat earlier than those of the Swedish mainland is also suggested by the fact that, according to Myrdal’s reckoning, the plague was peaking in Lübeck in July and August of 1350 (Myrdal 2003, 153). While Sweden was much nearer to Gotland geographically, many Low German-speaking Visbyers would have had closer ties to Lübeck.

The clearest sign of the dramatic impact of the plague on Gotlanders’ mental landscapes is a runic inscription, G 293, found on a horizontal gravestone in the floor of Lärbro church. The Gotlandic countryside was generally less severely afflicted by the plague than the capital (Myrdal’s findings list an increase from two deaths in 1348, none in 1349, to eight in 1350, compared with Visby’s 111).<sup>11</sup> But there were significant casualties in rural areas too, and G 293 attests to their impact. The Old Gutnish inscription commemorates one Hegvarðr, a man who is otherwise completely unknown:

**guþ : nabi : hehuars : sial : sum : h---... ..u : gera fem þusend : ar : ok :  
ainu : a... mina : en : tu : hundra ... -r : uaru : af : adami : ok : ti- : -uz  
: byrþ : et þusend : ar : ok : þry : hundr-þ ar : ok fimtihi : ar : uar : af :  
guz : byrþ : ok til : tihra : dauþa ...**<sup>12</sup>

May God be gracious to Hegvarðr’s soul, who . . . make five thousand years and one less than two hundred years had passed since Adam and until

<sup>10</sup> Myrdal (2006, 158–59) does acknowledge the supermortality factor.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Per-Göran Eriksson’s estimation (1974, 89) of a farm-desertion rate in rural Gotland of 11–17% (cited in Harrison 2000, 508). Note, however, that a general agrarian economic slow-down in the 1300s also informs the figures (Eriksson 1974, 96–97).

<sup>12</sup> G 293. Accessed on Rundata 3.1.

God's birth, a thousand years and three hundred and fifty years from God's birth and until the Black Death . . .

The inscription is noteworthy for two reasons: first, the word **tihra : daupa** represents Old Gutnish *\*digradaupi*<sup>13</sup> 'the Great Death', the earliest iteration of the word still used in modern Swedish for the Black Death, *digerdöden*. Second, as Harrison (2000, 405–06) points out, it demonstrates that at least some Gotlanders were thinking of the plague as an event of the same order as the BC/AD shift: *Man började hänvisa till händelser som något som inträffat det eller det året 'före/efter pesten'* 'One began to refer to events as something that happened on such-and-such a year "before/after the plague"'. The Black Death had become a chronological fixture by which other events could be dated. Although the inscription is only partially legible, it is still apparent that the carver is conceiving of a juxtaposition: the birth of Christ in the 5,199th year of the world, and the coming of the *\*digradaupi* in 1350, presumably the cause of Hegvarðr's demise. Perhaps there is a hint here at an eschatological parallel, with Christ's first coming contrasted with an event so horrible that it must have been a sign that His second coming was imminent. If, when first commissioned, the inscription was inspired by a sense that the plague was immediately pre-apocalyptic or mid-apocalyptic, with the passage of time the words must have taken on a post-apocalyptic dimension too: The presence of the gravestone in the floor of the church would have regularly reminded the congregation of a colossal occurrence in their past which they could not ignore or try to forget. For the rune-literate, the event by which Hegvarðr's death was chronologically measured—and the likely cause of his death—would be remembered long after the man himself was forgotten.

<sup>13</sup> The asterisk is perhaps overcautious, as the word is obviously attested in runes in the genitive case. Nonetheless, we do not have examples of the equivalent of Old West Norse *dauði* or Old Swedish *döpe* in the surviving Old Gutnish corpus.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WHO WAS TIDERICUS?

It must be admitted at the outset that Tidericus enjoys a greater degree of prominence in the present study than the other eight people who were burned in Visby in the summer of 1350. This is because he is the target of the most detailed extant allegations, and the only named personality in the whole affair. It is likely that his fellow victims were the subject of similarly imaginative charges, but those levelled against Tidericus are the fullest that survive. Some details are also given concerning the accusations against the two unnamed ‘priests’ (to whom we shall return shortly), but we do not have names or supposed itineraries for them as we do for Tidericus. The unfortunate *organista* thus serves as something of a *pars pro toto* figure for examining the fates of all the nine described in the Visby letters as *maleficos seu intoxicatores*.

Tidericus does not appear in any sources other than Letters A and B. However, it is possible to infer some genuine details about him. As has previously been alluded to, the Latinised Tidericus is probably best understood as Diderik, the Low-German form of Dietrich, Low German being the variety of German spoken by the majority of immigrants to fourteenth-century Scandinavia. Moreover, his employment at the German-speaking church of St Olaf reinforces the likelihood that he was a German rather than a Swedish/Gotlandic Diderik. The Hanseatic sources list his profession as *organista*. Simon (2010, 122–23) argues that the word is a clumsy formation from Medieval Latin *organizare*, and therefore the meaning is that Tidericus was the ‘organiser’ of the plot. This sense of *organista* is not attested elsewhere (Niermeyer and van de Kieft 2002, *s.v.* ‘organista’). Although such a mistake is not inconceivable in Letter B’s Latin, the context rules it out. The letters give more details about Tidericus’s relationship with his handlers than those of his co-accused, but he is not depicted coordinating their actions. If he was thought to have supplied the priests with their poison, the letters do not record it, and the general impression is that the Jews had hired several agents, assisting and known to each other, but still carrying out independent plots. For example, the priests are not mentioned in relation to Tidericus’s wanderings before he arrived in Gotland, and Tidericus is

not mentioned during the alleged poisoning of the maniple. The better attested occurrences of the word *organista* denote either an organ maker, an organ player or a musician more generally (Niermeyer and van de Kieft 2002). Scholars have differed over which interpretation they prefer. Hans Aili (1990, 19 n. 1) reasons that

*Organista* används på medeltidslatin i betydelseorna ‘orgelbyggare’, ‘organist’ och musiker. Den sistnämnda betydelsen förefaller dock mest ha använts om kungens musiker. Då det framgår av texten att den person som åsytts inte var bofast eller hade tjänst på Gotland, vilket man skulle ha väntat sig av en kyrko-organist, tycks det mest sannolikt, att textavsnittet handlar om en kringresande orgelbyggare.

*Organista* in medieval Latin was used to mean ‘organ maker’, ‘organist’ and musician. The last meaning, however, seems most to have been used for the king’s musician. As the text makes it clear that the person who was accused was not permanently settled or employed on Gotland, which one would have expected of a church organist, it seems most probable that the episode refers to a travelling organ builder.

The same definition of *organista* is favoured by Harrison (2000, 405–06). However, this reading is not conclusive. True, Letters A and B depict Tidericus as itinerant, and do nothing to build up an image of him as a native Gotlander. However, they do not state that the immigrant *organista* was unemployed or in any way withdrawn from society in Visby. Letter A describes Tidericus’s alleged travels in Germany and the Baltic, stating at one point that

declinavit ab eo ad civitates, videlicet Hannoveram, Patensem, Gronowe, Peyne, Bokelem, Tzerstede, Hyldensem, et ibidem in civitatibus omnes fontes et puteos ac in villis circumquaque, quo transiit, intoxicavit veneficiis supradictis.

he wandered from city to city, apparently including Hanover, Baden, Gronau, Berne, Bockenem, Sarstedt, Hildesheim, and as said in each city and in all the surrounding towns he polluted all the wells and water sources as he went with the aforementioned poisons.

Letter B accuses him of similar peripeteia in Sweden:

lucide fatebatur, quod omnes puteos in civitatibus Stocholm, Arosie, Arboga et singulas paludes, aquas stantes, puteos alios, quo transiit Sweciam, circumquaque suis veneficiis intoxicavit

(he) clearly admitted how he would poison all the wells in the cities of Stockholm, Västerås and Arboga, and every lake, fresh water source, and various wells as he travelled around Sweden, everywhere poisoning away with his concoctions.

Rather than being unemployed or having no connection to Visby before being accused, there are good grounds to believe that Tidericus was employed at the church of St Olaf. Letter B has this to say regarding one of the two so-called priests from St Olaf's who was also accused:

Idem fatebatur, quod feria secunda Penthecostes, cum missam celebraret<sup>1</sup> in ecclesia sancti Olavi nobiscum, mapulam, quam ad hoc officium peragendum<sup>2</sup> habuit, veneficiis intoxicavit.

He admitted that on the second day of Pentecost, when he was celebrating the mass in the church of St Olaf here, he spiked with poison the maniple which he used to perform the service.

To accuse two preachers who had officiated at the church together with the church's organ-player would be a neat localisation of the fantasy, especially if there were political reasons for targeting the congregation of St Olaf's in particular, as will be argued later in this book. The interpretation of Tidericus as an organ-player rather than an organ-builder is also preferred by Ole J. Benedictow (2004, 178), who describes Tidericus as 'an executed peripatetic player of a regal (a "medieval portable organ")'.

We cannot know how many of the places listed in Letters A and B Tidericus had really visited. His characterisation as both a wide traveller and a foreigner to Gotland, however, is probably correct. Without family connections on the island, he would have been an easy target for the accusations which were brought against him. Who was there to vouch for him, and who would risk their own lives by speaking out anyway? It is tempting, though unprovable and rather romantic, to imagine Tidericus as a drifter or free spirit, a musician who had left home in northern Germany to see the world, and could never have expected to fall victim to the intrigues of the Visbyers.

### Who were the 'two who thought of themselves as priests'?

Letter B demonstrates a degree of scepticism over whether two of the accused really were clergymen: *inter predictos novem duo fuerunt, qui se pro sacerdotibus reputaverunt*. The verb *reputare* is not straightforward in this context. Its usual meaning is 'to think over, ponder, meditate, reflect upon' or 'to impute, ascribe' (Lewis and Short 1907, s.v. 'rēpūto'). In his translation of Letter B to modern Swedish, Aili (*Egb*, 19) opts for

<sup>1</sup> Emended from *celebrat* by Wehrmann (*CdL*, 106); accepted silently by Aili (*Egb*, 18).

<sup>2</sup> Emended from *peragendo* by Aili (1990, 18 n. 2).

*framställde sig som präster* ‘presented themselves as priests’. Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen (2014, 73) translates the phrase ‘disguised as clergy’. Referring back to the reflexive pronoun *se pro*, I prefer ‘thought of themselves as’, though the awkwardness of the corresponder’s phrasing permits variation. My reasoning here is that one of the men appears to have officiated at the mass at St Olaf’s. He would presumably not have done so unless he had been ordained, or unless he had the sort of anti-clerical zeal which postulated that personal piety rather than ordination in the established church was the only qualification necessary to say mass (as occasionally exhibited amongst the Beghards, to whom we shall return shortly; see Leff 1999, 374–76). The phrase ‘thought of themselves as priests’ admits both possibilities: 1) that the men were officially ordained, but that the authorities were dismissive, or 2) that the men were not officially ordained, but considered themselves to have equivalent qualifications. Doubt about the men’s status also appears to have inspired the inverted commas used by Pernler (1977, 210–11) in his reference, cited previously, to *två ‘sacerdotes’*.

Turning from translation to interpretation, we must consider how seriously the letter’s hesitancy on the clerical credentials of these two men ought to be taken. Their alleged actions alone would be enough to engender a sense of scepticism about their priestliness, even if their qualifications had been irreproachably in order. Crucial to the question is how they were imagined to have poisoned the *mapula* (‘maniple’, the napkin with which the chalice is wiped, later a liturgical vestment in its own right). Letter B claims that the same man who called out ‘*Tota christianitas perdita est*’ from the flames was also the one who did the poisoning. If he poisoned the maniple, was he also the one who wielded it while celebrating the mass? As Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen (2014, 72–73) surmises, it would appear so. *Celebraret missam* ‘he would have been celebrating the mass’ (emended by Wehrmann and then Aili from *celebrat* ‘he celebrates the mass’) has no obvious subject other than the indefinite pronoun *idem*, being the same who *fatebatur* ‘admitted’ the crime. *Celebraret* might perhaps theoretically be interpreted as applying to another party, such as a third innocent priest, or perhaps simply a phantom impersonal third person pronoun, that is, ‘when *one* would have been celebrating the mass’. However, these interpretations are not supported by Letter B in the form which scribal tradition has handed it down to us.

Itinerant preachers—perhaps friars or even anti-clerical lay mendicants—belonged to a demographic of those who 1) might sometimes celebrate



the mass, even if illegitimately in the case of lay mendicants, 2) might well be described as ‘thinking of themselves as priests’, 3) could probably be burnt at the stake without much protest from ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>3</sup> This is the interpretation supported by Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen (2014, 72–73):

Since there were no Jews in medieval Scandinavia, mendicant friars may have been even more exposed to suspicion [there]. Indeed, during a major trial in Visby on Gotland, probably around 1350, when 12 people [*sic*] were arrested and sentenced for poisoning the drinking water in Gotland and large parts of Sweden, two of them ‘*qui se pro sacerdotibus reputaverunt*’, were indeed disguised as clergy. What kind of clergy is not stated, but one of them was a travelling preacher who had been allowed by the parish priest of St Olav church in Visby to say Mass on the second day of Pentecost, during which he poisoned the entire community in a most evil manner . . . The false preacher had admitted all this, although only after being put physical confessional pressure, and had also admitted that it was an evil plot masterminded by the Jews. Just before he was burned at the stake, the preacher shouted that ‘All Christianity is doomed, unless healed by the interception of God. Be aware of priests and clergy of all kind[s]’. Although nothing is said here about Dominicans or mendicants, a story like this, undoubtedly soon distributed to all of Scandinavia and Northern Germany, must have caused some raised eyebrows the next time a travelling Dominican preacher came to the parish with a sack on his shoulder and a wish to preach and say Mass in the church.

Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen is wisely cautious on the issue of the two preachers’ affiliation. It is not altogether impossible that they were Dominicans. On the continent, the case of the roughly contemporaneous Henry Suso (d. 1366), which we will examine in further detail later, demonstrates how a wandering Dominican might become embroiled in anti-Jewish violence. However, the Dominicans do not appear to have been particularly controversial figures in fourteenth-century Scandinavia:<sup>4</sup> one, Jón Halldórsson, was bishop of Skálholt from 1322 to 1339 (Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson 1996, esp. 29–35). Nor were they often implicated in the kind of anti-clericalism apparently exhibited in the preacher’s last words from the pyre. The same is true of the Franciscans, who are known to have maintained a presence in Visby and also produced a necrologium for the town, the *Diarum fratrum minorum*

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reader for suggesting this possibility to me.

<sup>4</sup> Some limited intra-ecclesiastical strife, though, is described by Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen (2008, 150–56). The priest Heyno of St Olaf’s, briefly mentioned earlier, was accused of heresy by local Dominicans in 1393. See Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen 2008, 260–61; Mitchell 2016, 41.

*Visbyensium* (1412). Had their initiates been in any way involved in the events of 1350, it would surely have been recorded. Instead, the *Diarum* passes over the affair in silence. Aside from the major mendicant orders, there were other varieties of travelling holy men who would have made more convenient targets for a set-up.

Anti-clerical or doctrinally heterodox movements are not well-represented in medieval Scandinavian history, perhaps because urbanisation was much weaker in Scandinavia than it was in more southerly regions, where the cities had proved to be natural environments for social and religious radicalism.<sup>5</sup> The Beguines (a lay order of nuns who had not taken official monastic vows, often suspected of heresy and anti-clericalism) are an important exception to this absence, being present in Denmark, Sweden and, specifically, Gotland from the thirteenth century onwards (Johansen 1985, 18–25; Harrison 2002, 575–76; Harrison 2015; Mitchell 2016, 49 n. 13). Until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there are no records of the Scandinavian Beguines coming into even minor conflict with either the formal clergy or secular power (Höjer 1905, 156; Harrison 2015). Their male counterparts, the Beghards, are not known from Nordic sources, but their potential involvement in Visby in 1350 is a possibility deserving mention. Characterised by Norman Cohn (1970, esp. 158–69, cf. Kieckhefer 1972, 67–68) as ‘an ill-defined and restless fraternity’, the Beghard movement was generally considered more liable to cause disturbances than its sister order, even though it must be stressed that Beghardism lacked unity in its beliefs (some were adepts of the Free Spirit heresy, others quite theologically conformist), its means (some were mendicants, others were artisans), and its aims (some were harmless cenobites, others were revolutionary rabble-rousers).<sup>6</sup> Travelling Beghards could easily be imagined touting anti-clerical views. To picture an adventurous Beghard manoeuvring his way into officiating a Mass at St Olaf’s in Visby, perhaps by presenting false credentials as suggested by Myrdal,<sup>7</sup> is rather more demanding: as they were a lay order, command of Latin amongst Beghards would have been very poor. Any Beghard who might hypothetically have been

<sup>5</sup> On the eighteen known instances of heresy from all five Scandinavian countries (including Greenland) from 1100 to 1526, of which only two were social movements rather than individual cases, see Mitchell 2016, 35–56.

<sup>6</sup> As Kieckhefer (1972, 28, 67 n. 31) notes, ‘Beghard’, like ‘Lollard’, is an exogenous label as much as an ideological identifier.

<sup>7</sup> *Det står att en av de anklagade hade låtsats vara präst* ‘It is written that one of the accused had pretended to be a priest’ (Myrdal 2003, 88).

given an opportunity to sing Mass would presumably not have made a very convincing effort. There is one known case of a Beghard assuming control of public liturgical duties, however: in 1322 the Beghard heresiarch, Walter, had been officiating in Cologne, much to the horror of ecclesiastical authorities (Leff 1999, 335 n. 5; see also Cohn 1970, 165). A circumstance which recommends the case for rogue Beghards in Visby is the combination of two tendencies: first, that adepts of the Free Spirit, who were often contiguous with Beghardism, were known to be radiating towards Hanseatic northern German towns in the second half of the fourteenth century; second, that Beghards occasionally parasitised existing Beguine communities (Cohn 1970, 162, 167). This northward momentum of the more radical Beguines, in addition to the presence of Beguines in Visby who might have been able to provide them with some logistical support, perhaps suggests that the two who died in Visby were early forerunners of the subsequent Free Spirit adepts who were later burnt at the stake in other Hanseatic cities, Lübeck in 1402 and Wismar in 1403 (*CDIHPN*, 260–61). Despite these circumstantial considerations, however, it must be remembered that there are absolutely no concrete signs of Beghard activity in Scandinavia, and that otherwise the only known case of a Beghard singing Mass is highly exceptional.

The flagellants were another controversial mass movement who were active in northern Europe during the middle of the fourteenth century. As there were relatively few cities in Scandinavia to provide them with avenues through which to parade, their apparent absence from the region is understandable.<sup>8</sup> If the two ‘priests’ were not really flagellants themselves, however, an anti-flagellant papal bull possibly propped up the pretext for their punishment. Pope Clement VI (r. 1342–52) was so dismayed by the proclivity of the flagellants for social discord, religious heterodoxy and, ironically for our purposes, violence against Jews, that on the 20th October 1349 he issued a bull condemning the movement. Towards the end of the circular, rather ominous words are used: *quod in hoc eis suffragari nolumus, faciatis et tam diu captos detineatis . . . invocato ad hoc, si opus fuerit, auxilio brachii secularis* ‘as we do not want to be supporting them in this, you should take and detain prisoners for a long time . . . you will invoke, if need be, the help of the secular branch’ (*AE*, 293; *LpF*, 287–89 [nos 2090–2091]). This would appear to be a euphemism for burning at the stake for heresy, as during the Middle

<sup>8</sup> As is true of the Beghards, though, if a stray were to turn up anywhere in the Nordic countries, Visby, the most advanced urban settlement in the region and the most Low German-dominated, would surely be the place.

Ages that crime and its horrific sentence were in the domain of the secular courts. (In cases of confirmed heresy an ecclesiastical court met only in order to hand the accused over to the secular branch.)

It is noteworthy for our purposes that, according to Norman Cohn (1970, 140), Clement's bull was expressly circulated in Sweden, as well as in Germany, Poland, France and England. It is disappointing that, in accordance with the historical writing style of his time, Cohn does not cite a source for this assertion—especially as all subsequent claims that Sweden was a specific addressee of the bull are apparently dependent on Cohn. The bull is not reproduced or mentioned in the *Diplomatarium Suecanum*, nor its expanded successor, the *Svenskt Diplomatariums huvudkartotek*. Indeed, the papal registers of Pope Clement VI list dispatches of the anti-flagellant bull to a number of British and Continental cities, but none in Scandinavia (*Les pays autres que la France*, fasc. 1, vol. 1, 288–89 [no. 2091]; *LrF*, fasc. 5, vol. 3, 31 [no. 4820]). Cohn may have been mistaken in saying that the bull was deliberately dispatched to Sweden (presumably to the archbishopric at Uppsala), but it is likely that the edict was known amongst the clergy of Gotland regardless, and perhaps even some quarters of the secular authorities too. Pope Clement maintained fairly regular correspondence on other matters with King Magnus, with Uppsala, Lund, and with the Linköping bishopric to which Visby was technically subject (*LpF*, 32 [no. 232], 33 [no. 244], 106–07 [no. 844], 192 [nos 1481 and 1482], 210 [no. 1597], 216 [nos 1630 and 1631], 249 [no. 1873],<sup>9</sup> 250 [nos 1875 and 1876], 260 [1940]).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the bull certainly was dispatched to Bremen and Cologne, both important Hanseatic hubs whose populations frequently participated in the traffic to and from Gotland (*LpF*, fasc. 2, vol. 1, 288–89 [no. 2091]). It would have mattered little if the two would-be priests were not actually guilty of flagellantism: they were still religious troublemakers and convenient scapegoats. Any Visbyer in authority, whether clerical or secular, would most likely have had few qualms exercising some elasticity with the term 'flagellant'.

If the two 'priests' were indeed wandering preachers of dubious status, the Church authorities in Visby may well have felt disinclined in the first

<sup>9</sup> This is particularly important as the letter attributes responsibility for the Hansa men to the three Scandinavian crowns and to the cities/archbishoprics of Lund, Uppsala and Niðarós.

<sup>10</sup> On Raymundus Pelegrinus especially, who must be the Rémundr of the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, see *LpF*, fasc. 2, vol. 1, 270 [no. 1995], fasc 1., vol. 1, 192 [no. 1481], cf. Cole 2015c, 12–13, n. 55, 257–58.

instance to refer to their superiors in Linköping, some 112 miles away in hostile Sweden, a semi-foreign country for a Gutnish speaker and an even more foreign country to a German. The 1349 bull would have been a clear justification for the Church to pass the accused on to the town council, and for the council to proceed straight to the pyre. Indeed, there was already a frequent tendency for close cooperation between ecclesiastical and civic authorities in Hanseatic towns: parish priests sometimes had official roles maintaining Hanseatic *kontore* (in Novgorod the *kontor* was even housed inside the church of St Olaf), and there are few traces of discord between Church and state from the Hanseatic cities before the Reformation (Murray 2013, 187; Wubs-Mrozewicz 2008, 86 n. 26, 87, 111, 135). If the Middle Low German *Sachsenspiegel* (c.1235) can be taken as representative of Low German legal theory (it is surely less demonstrative of actual legal praxis) we must note that a crime very like that of Tidericus and the preachers demands death at the stake apparently without intervention from ecclesiastical courts. A version copied around the time of the Visby burnings (c.1348–71) reads: *Welch cristenman oder wip ungloubig is unde mit czouber ummeget oder mit vorgift unde des vorwunden wirt, di sal man uf der hort burnen* ‘One must burn at the stake any Christian man or woman who is unbelieving (in Christianity) and traffics in magic or with poisoning and who carries out (their plan)’ (Cod. Guelf. 3.1 Aug. 2to, 29v).<sup>11</sup> The law-code that would properly have been in effect in Visby ought to have been the *Wisby Stadslag*, which was adopted in 1288. However, it is hard to see how the crimes and sentences described in the *Wisby Stadslag* would have been applied to Tidericus’s and the priests’ situation. There is a provision stating that if one is guilty of murder and there is no wound on the body, which would of course be true of poisoning, then in the absence of witnesses one can be absolved by taking an oath, though as the men supposedly confessed this would not have saved them (*CiV*, 54). If the councillors of Visby knew laws such as those of the *Sachsenspiegel*, if the city’s churchmen knew Clement’s bull, and if those same clergy were little inclined towards conflict with the city, it would scarcely have helped the two wandering preachers even if they had belonged to major orders or been properly ordained priests.

<sup>11</sup> The standard printed edition provides an earlier Middle Low German text, rather than the aforementioned manuscript’s Central German: *Swelk kersten man ungelovich is oder mit tovere umme geit oder mit vorgiftnisse, unde des verwunnen wert, den scal men op der hort bernen* ‘When a Christian man is unbelieving or dealing in magic or poisoning, and it comes to completion, one shall burn him at the stake (*SL*, 143–44).

Pending the discovery of further evidence, the precise affiliation of the two ‘priests’ will elude us. It may well be that they were independent of any over-arching denomination. If they were able to recite Mass they might simply have been actual priests who had turned to the friar lifestyle of their own accord, as Walter of Cologne supposedly did. One thing we can say with near-certainty is that the men were of German extraction. They had sought to officiate at St Olaf’s, a Low German-speaking congregation. Clerics in Visby were often immigrants, which would have made them susceptible to accusation in the same way that Tidericus probably was. Moreover, anti-clerical preaching was a tradition with a rich pedigree in northern Germany, which had virtually no history at all on the Scandinavian mainland.<sup>12</sup> The only other attestations of rambunctious rabble-rousing preachers making their way to Scandinavia come from nearly two centuries after Tidericus’s death. Tellingly, however, both were apparently following Hanseatic trade routes. A Swedish annal completed in the sixteenth century records that *1529 kommo hit någre köpsvänner, som hade en Tysk Prest med sig, hvilken prädikade emot Herrar, Förstar ok Konungar* ‘in 1529 some merchants came here who had a German priest with them, who preached against lords, princes and kings’ (‘Mårkvårdiga Händelser i Sverige ifrån 1220 till 1552’ in *SRSMA*, 91). The other case is that of a Dutch trader named Hinrick van Hasselt (fl. 1520s, d. after 1543), who traded for a while at the Bergen *Kontor* and apparently managed to get into disputes with more or less everyone around him, not least for allegedly touting the doctrine that ‘Jesus’ and ‘Christ’ were not one and the same person (Wubs-Mrozewicz 2008, 236–42; see also Wubs-Mrozewicz 2006, 1–20).

Of the remaining six accused in Visby, we know nothing; they were probably proletarians of such little consequence as to be wholly dispensable. It is conceivable that they were part of the congregation of St Olaf’s too, as it appears that Tidericus and the preachers had been, but on this point we are deep in the realm of speculation.

<sup>12</sup> For thoughtful and nuanced comment on the anti-clerical tendency as demonstrated in Middle Low German, see Heß 2015b, 25–28, 185–88.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ACCUSATION AND FANTASY

Synthesising the details provided in the Hanseatic correspondence, there is a coherent fantasy to be found in the accusations levelled against Tidericus and his co-accused. Letter A claims that

dum [Tidericus] morte dampnabatur, et cum igni debuit apponi, coram omni populo fatebatur, quod servivit equitando in terra Saxonie cum quodam advocato, nomine Volkersum, prope Hyldensem, circa quem erat multum bene acceptus, ita quod, quidquid egit seu dimisit, inviolatum hoc utique permansit. Tandem venit ad unam civitatem, nomine Dasle, ad quendam Judeum, nomine Aaron, filium Salomonis divitis de Honovere, qui cum ipso concordavit et dedit illi XXX marcas puri argenti cum CCC bursiculis cum veneficiis et intoxicacionibus, cum quibus christianitatem, ut fecit, destruere deberet. Et sic declinavit ab eo ad civitates, videlicet Hannoveram, Patensem, Gronowe, Peyne, Bokelem, Tzerstede, Hyldensem, et ibidem in civitatibus omnes fontes et puteos ac in villis circumquaque, quo transit, intoxicavit veneficiis supradictis, et cum populus incepit communiter mori, versus Lubeke fugam cepit et in via illa dictas XXX marcas totaliter detesseravit. Et cum venit Lubek, in hospicio Hermannii Sassen, sui hospitis, quidam Judeus, nomine Moyses, sibi occurrebat, cui narravit omnia ante dicta, et ille Moyses ipsi Tiderico X marcas lubecenses cum quodam pixide cum veneficiis condonavit, et sic de Lubek versus Vrowenborch in terra Prucie transvelificavit, ibi circa XL homines vel plures [ibi] tradidit morti, et inde versus Memele, ubi iterum circa XL capita interfecit, et deine versus Hassenputh, ubi XL homines vel plures moriebantur de predictis. Deine versus Goldinge, ubi XL, et in Piltena XL homines, et ultra in Winda quot capita interfecit, nescivit propter ipsorum pluralitatem exceptis Cur[i]onibus mortuis et intefectis de eodem.

when [Tidericus] was condemned to death he admitted to us—and when he was put atop the fire he confessed in front of everyone—that he served riding on horseback in the land of Saxony alongside a certain go-between by the name of Volkersum, who lived near Hildesheim, of whose company he was very glad, so that whatever [poison] he made or sent off, it [Hildesheim?] would remain unharmed. At last he went to a certain city called Dassel to meet a certain Jew by the name of Aaron, son of Salomon the Wealthy of Hanover, who made an agreement with him [Aaron] to pay the aforementioned thirty marks of pure silver together with 300 little pouches with poison and venom with which to eradicate Christianity utterly. And so he departed from him

for the cities, namely Hanover, Baden, Gronau, Berne, Bockenem, Serstadt, Hildesheim, and in each city and in all the surrounding towns he polluted all the wells and water sources as he went with the aforementioned poisons. And when the people from every walk of life began to die, he fled towards Lübeck and on the way completely used up his aforementioned thirty marks. And when he reached Lübeck, in the lodgings of Hermann Sassen, his host, a certain Jew by the name of Moses met him and he [Tidericus] told him all the aforesaid things, and this Moyses gave Diderik ten Lübecker marks together with a small medicine box of (or containing) poison, and thus from Lübeck he sailed for Frombork in the land of Prussia. There he brought about the death of around forty people or more. And from there he headed for Klaipėda, where for a second time he took forty lives, and from there to Aizpute where more than forty died as before. From there to Kuldīga, where forty died, and forty people in Piltene, and beyond the Venta river he did not know himself how many lives he took because of their great number, only that the Courlanders perished and died in the same way.

The setting here is decidedly Hanseatic. Tidericus is sponsored by two Jews, Aaron in Dassel and Moyses in Lübeck (the names chosen are very much stereotypical in the Judaeophobic imagination). This is a classic motif in the accusations made by Hanseatic administrators to explain plague outbreaks elsewhere. Indeed, chains of employment, with a supposed commissioner allegedly paying others to distribute poison, who sometimes in turn commissioned their own subordinate poisoners, were common in several medieval plague fantasies (*JiCE*, 154–55; Barber 1981) For example, in the introductory matter to Letter A, before the councillors of Lübeck get round to mentioning Visby, they relate that *Insinuaemus vestre preexcellenti nobilitati, quod nuper quendam malefactorem, nomine Keyenort, in nostra civitate captivavimus* ‘we wish to inform your noble excellence that we recently captured in our city [Lübeck] a certain evil-doer by the name of Keyenort’. The prisoner was said to be guilty of

intoxicacanis maleficium in diversis locis a Prucia inchoanda usque ad nostram civitatem Lubek ex perswasione Judeorum exercuisset, pro quo solummodo asseruit se tres solidos grossorum a quodam Judeo sublevasse.

the crime of poisoning in various places in Prussia, right up to our city of Lübeck, trained at the instigation of the Jews, for which he would have got for himself a mere three groats, provided by a certain Jew.

The letter goes on to relate that the Jews responsible were named David and Mosseke. This tripartite structure, where a gentile agent is supposedly sponsored by two absent Jewish handlers, was apparently a popular strategy for explaining outbreaks of plague in the towns of



northern Germany. David-Mosseke-Keyenort is essentially the same formula as Aaron-Moyses-Tidericus.

The geographical setting laid out in Letter A would have made a great deal of sense to German-speaking Visbyers. Hanover, Baden, Gronau, Berne, Bockenem, Serstadt, Hildesheim, Lübeck, Frombork, Klaipėda, Kuldīga, Piltene and Courland: these were the Allemanophone settlements that constituted major trading nodes for Baltic-oriented Hansards. Many of Visby's German speakers would have had colleagues and family in these areas. Even inland German conurbations that were quite far from the Baltic trade routes, such as Hanover, were historically connected to the German-speaking Visbyers by familial ties; as has been pointed out, in addition to their *Schleswigsch* and Prussian commercial backgrounds many of the Visbyers were of Westphalian descent (Lindström 1892, 505). Connecting outbreaks of the plague in these cities to the appearance of the disease in Visby would have had a natural appeal for the German-Visbyer *Weltanschauung*. It would have reminded the German-speaking Visbyers that they were part of a greater *deutschsprachig* cultural and political entity, one that faced common threats and responded to them with common means, and one that was quite different from the world of the hostile Gotlanders beyond the city's imposing stone walls. Moreover, by situating the Tidericus myth in Hanseatic space, Visbyers could feel as though they were a vigilant part of a common initiative; that they were looking out for their fellow Hansards and that their fellow Hansards were looking out for them.<sup>1</sup> Letter B, on the other hand, provides a markedly different setting:

oram communi populo in ultimo sue vite et eciam prius non coactus lucide fatebatur, quod omnes puteos in civitatibus Stocholm, Arosie, Arboga et singulas paludes, aquas stantes, puteos alios, quo transiit Sweciam, circumquaque suis veneficiis intoxicavit, ipsiusque veneficii magnam partem cum ipso et post ipsum invenimus, quod penitus, et non immerito, est destructum. Eciam dixit idem in extremis suis, cum igno debuit apponi, quod actu nobiscum pulverem quandam coxerat et temperaverat, de quo unus hominum in tota terra Godlandie, si vixisset ad unius anni circulum, vivus non debuit remansisse, suis duntaxat exceptis.

in the last moments of his life, before the very eyes of the common people, and also with no prior coercion, [he] clearly admitted how he would poison all the wells in the cities of Stockholm, Västerås and Arboga, and every lake and fresh water source and various wells as he travelled around Sweden, everywhere poisoning away with his concoctions. He carried a great deal of

<sup>1</sup> On the proclivity of threats to solidify collective axiologies more generally, see Rothbart and Korostalina 2006, 34–37.

his poison-mixing equipment on his person and we have since [his death] discovered [more]—and carefully and not without reason destroyed it. Also, he said in his last moments, when he was about to be put on the fire (as was his sentence), that recently while he had been among us he had mixed and cooked up some powder from which not one living man, with the exception of his own kind, would have remained on the whole island of Gotland, if he [Tidericus] had lived just one more year.

Strictly speaking, Letter B does not contradict the details in Letter A. The accusations levelled against Tidericus were already so fantastic that the addition of Sweden to his itinerary would have been unlikely to strain credulity further. Neither does Letter B corroborate the geography of Letter A. The setting in Letter B is exclusively Swedish. True, Stockholm had a substantial German-speaking population at the time, but Västerås and particularly Arboga were certainly not Hanseatic cities in the mode of, for example, Tallinn (Reval) or Gdańsk (Danzig).<sup>2</sup> It is very hard to imagine German-speaking Visbyers being as horrified by the image of the poisoner in Västerås and Arboga as they were by the thought of a threat to Lübeck or Wismar. Moreover, the threat to eliminate the population *in tota terra Gotlandie* ‘on the whole island of Gotland’ can hardly have been intended to affect people who, as we have seen, had a long history of antagonism with the natives outside the city walls. The phrase *terra Gotlandie*, as opposed to *civitas Gotlandie*, was apparently a somewhat charged delineation, specifically intended to refer to Gutnish-speaking Gotland. As Lindström (1892, 444) observed,

Gotland bildade i sjelfva verket två fristater: Staden, en för sig, mer än hälften tysk, med sitt råd i spetsen, samt Landet med sina tredingsprostar och sina landsdomare som förstyren. Också ser man huru strängt denna tvådelning iakttoogs, när det i medeltidsurkunder talas om *civitas Gotlandie*—Visby, och *terra Gotlandie*—landsbygden.

In real terms, Gotland imagined itself as two independent states: The City, looking after itself, more than half German, with its council in charge, and The Countryside, with its provosts and its rural judges as the administration. One

<sup>2</sup> On Hanseatic Stockholm see Wubs-Mrozewicz 2004. It has been claimed (North 2011, 90) that Västerås was up to a third Low German-speaking during the *Hansezeit*, though I have not been able to locate the sources for this assertion. I am open to being proved wrong on this point, but it must be noted that it was in Västerås that Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson’s peasant rebellion would begin in 1434. This seems rather to necessitate warm feelings towards a Sweden ruled by Swedes in that particular region. One assumes that such sentiments would have been antithetical to a putative Hansa supremacy (even though there was little love lost between Eric of Pomerania (r. 1412–39), whom Engelbrekt rose against, and the Hansa men).

further sees how seriously this dichotomy was taken from medieval records, which speak of *civitas Gotlandie*—Visby, and *terra Gotlandie*—the countryside.

But there was a demographic in Visby for which all these geographical details would have been absolutely terrifying: the Gutnish speakers. Sweden was, for them, technically a foreign country, but it was also their closest neighbour. As seen in the case of King Magnus Ladulås, the Swedes had previously been interested in exploiting divisions between Gutnish speakers and the German Visbyers. For the Gotlander on the street or in the field, this surely seemed more like solidarity than opportunism. Rural Gotland enjoyed a form of union with the Swedish crown. According to *Guta saga* (*Gus*, 6), the Gotlanders had willingly submitted to the Swedish king

þy et þair mattin frir ok frelsir sykia Suiariki i huerium staþ utan tull ok allar utgiftir. So aigu ok suiar sykia Gutland firir utan kornband ellar annur forþuþ. Hegnan ok hielp skuldi kunungr gutum at vaita, en þair viþr þorftin ok kallapin.

so that they could freely and unhindered travel to every town in Sweden without tolls and all other charges. Thus, the Swedes also have the right to travel to Gotland without ban against trade in corn or other prohibitions. The king was to show the Gotlanders protection and assistance whenever they needed it or called for it.

Furthermore, Old Swedish and Old Gutnish were mutually intelligible languages. The lawcode of Visby (the *Wisby Stadslog*) appears to recognise a particular affinity between Gotlanders and Scandinavians, which may well be predicated on linguistic grounds: *de Gotenschen radman tyghen ouer. goten. sueden. norman, oder denen. Mer de dydeschen radman tyghen ouer alle anderen tunghen* ‘The Gotlandic councillors testify over the Gotlanders, Swedes, Norwegians or Danes. But the German councillors testify over all other languages’ (*CiV*, 31).

The affinity between Gotland and Sweden must have felt all the more pronounced in the face of the German-speaking domination in Visby. Hearing about threats to Sweden in Letter B probably evoked roughly the same kind of feelings in Gutnish speakers as hearing about the alleged danger to Lübeck in Letter A did in German speakers. Most importantly, it is not just Visby that is at risk from the purported Jewish menace in Letter B, but the whole *terra Godlandie*. That is to say, the families of Gutnish-speaking Visbyers beyond the town walls are also depicted as being directly under threat. It appears as though in Letters A and B we have two faces of the same fantasy; A presented chiefly to the German-speaking population, B to the Gutnish.

The list of supposed orchestrators of the plot was the stuff of conspiracy theory of a very modern-looking sort. To my knowledge, this is the earliest source for the antisemitic notion that a clandestine organisation, spanning

international government and commerce, is secretly running global affairs. Jews had long been imagined by Christians as conspiratorial. The New Testament itself exhibited tropes which fuelled this perception (e.g. Luke 22: 4–6, Matthew 12:14, 20:18). So too there was nothing novel in the international dimension to their alleged scheming, e.g. Thomas of Monmouth (fl. 1149–72) wrote that Jews in every country acknowledge a court of rabbis in Narbonne, who decide by lots which community of Jews must sacrifice a Christian child every year (*ToM*, 93–94). What is novel about Letter B is its depiction of a secret society—indeed, the word *societatis* is used—comprising both Jews *and* gentiles, with secret identifying marks, who are pulling the strings behind the scenes. This is an image which is closer to modern stories about the Bilderberg Group or the New World Order than it is to Thomas of Monmouth's imagined rabbinic court. According to Letter B,

Ceterum ibidem [Tidericus] recognovit, quod plurimi essent de sua societate, qui se pro divitibus mercatoribus et quibuscunque aliis per totum mundum officiis reputant et per plurimos reputantur, et vadunt cum cingulis<sup>3</sup> argenteis, et omnes tales incedunt quasi deliri et aliquid insensati, eciam tales quodam signo greco vel hebrayco sunt signati. Ultimatum dixit: Nescio plura vobis dicere, sed tota christianitas est per Judeos et pessimos nos intoxicata.

What is more, at the same time he [Tidericus] admitted that there are many who belong to a certain society which consisted of rich merchants and all the kinds of people who hold office all over the world, as many people know they do, and each of them goes around with silver belts, and they are all half mad or crazed in some other way. Also, they are all marked with a letter written in Greek or Hebrew. In his last moment he said 'Need I say more? All Christendom has been poisoned by us villains and the Jews'.

This is one of the more detailed plague/poisoning fantasies preserved in medieval sources, perhaps only exceeded by an extraordinary account from France in 1322, where spurious documents emerged 'proving' that the Muslim King of Granada was soliciting French Jews to organise lepers into infecting drinking water with their bodily fluids (the lepers would then be made rulers over what was left of the newly leprous French nation, see Barber 1981, 1–17; Nirenberg 1996, esp. 53–101). There are several details worth noting in the description of this mysterious secret society. First, there is a curious sense of psychological projection at play. If we accept that the

<sup>3</sup> Emended from *singulis* by Aili (*Egb*, 18). The original *singulis argenteis* 'pieces of silver (coins?)' is a plausible interpretation, but the point of the identifying marks seems to be that they are remarkable or fantastic. Exotic-looking costume is more in line with the Greek and Hebrew letters than coins or nondescript metal tokens, which are comparatively mundane items.

details of Letter B were intended to be particularly palatable to Gutnish-speaking sensitivities, it is ironic that the Hanseatic administrators should attempt to lay the blame on a wealthy, international mercantile class. One might think that this was not a general line of thought that the Hansards would be keen to encourage, given the history of animosity against them on behalf of the rural Gotlanders. Second, there is the related implication that the organisation is not wholly Jewish, because the average Visbyer would only have to look at his own town council to see that there were plenty of rich people in commerce and politics who were definitely not Jews, despite the perceived association between Jews and mercantilism.

The role of gentiles in the secret society was perhaps a natural corollary to the fact that all the nine people to be burnt were themselves not Jewish, i.e. if Jews can work alongside non-Jews at the 'delivery end' of a plot, why not further up in the planning process too? It is plausible that the gentile component of the organisation was supposed to be heretics. Although theological orthodoxy held that Judaism was a different religion to Christianity, rather than a heresy of it, the image of the Jew and the heretic were often aligned in medieval culture, both textual and visual (Cohen 1999, 157–59; Frassetto 2002, 8–15; Lipton 2014, 132–33, 140–42). Importantly, heretics were widely imagined to be stealthy, appearing to be innocuous while duplicitously seducing the unwary into religious error (consider the motif of Reynard the Fox wearing priestly garb, preaching to unsuspecting fowl, see Hardwick 2011, 49–50). The case of the Lollards is a prime example of how priests or knights could be imagined to be heretics—and sometimes actually were—despite their social stature. That a seemingly respectable preacher whose sermons one had rather enjoyed might in fact be an undercover heretic, and even a heretic in Jewish service, would perhaps have been a wild thought to a fourteenth-century Visbyer, but it would have been a thought with a degree of precedent in medieval culture.

Third, there is the detail of wearing *cingulis argenteis* 'silver belts'. This appears to be another allusion to Jews. Fifteenth-century Polish sources record silver belts as traditional costume amongst the Aškenazim (Dov Weinryb 1973, 84). Fourth, there is the strange image of the tattoos in Greek and Hebrew letters. Here, we seem to be very much in the realm of Orientalism; an effort to produce 'The East' and to make it inscrutable, mysterious and hostile.<sup>4</sup> The Greek letters in particular appear to constitute

<sup>4</sup> The 'Othering' of Hebrew was, according to Edward Said (1978, 98, cf. 142–43), one of the crucial psychological manoeuvres that prepared the ideological ground for Orientalism: '[Karl Wilhelm Friedrich] Schlegel's lectures on language and on life, history, and literature are full of these discriminations, which he made without

references to the role of heretics in the conspiracy, as by the fourteenth century the Latin west was turning increasingly towards the view that the Greek east was irretrievably heretical, perhaps even in league with the Saracens rather than resisting them.<sup>5</sup> On the whole, however, the concerns of Letter B are more tangible-material than spiritual-theological. Here, Greek and Hebrew are serving as basic ciphers for what is foreign. There is nothing in the details of Letter B which has much to do with either authentic Jewish belief or learned Christian anti-Judaism. Inauthenticity was not the preserve of ‘low’ antisemitic imagery; the Jewish avatar depicted in Peter Abelard’s *Dialogus inter Philosophum, Iudaeum et Christianum*, for example, is really a sock-puppet for Abelard’s criticisms of Judaism, but inherent to ‘high’ disputational literature there is an idea that Judaism is a set of beliefs which can be repudiated (see Marenbon and Orlandi 2003, xlvī–xlvii). Letter B does not even reproduce *faulty* ideas about Jewish belief—only invective ideas about Jewish behaviour.

The Jewish avatars of the Visbyers’ fantasy belong more to the domain of antisemitism than anti-Judaism. By turning the sacred tongues of the Bible into conspirators’ tattoos, the fantasy enters a distinctly corporeal field. Structured thought, allegory or symbolism are dashed against fear and fancy. These images do not attempt the pretence of reasoned, interfaith debate. They certainly do not prompt deeper questions of ‘why’ or ‘how’ all this is happening. Letter B urges only spectacle: to look upon the body, to look upon the nonsensical glyphs that have been inscribed upon it. The conspirators are, after all, *omnes tales incedunt quasi deliri et aliquid insensati* ‘all half mad or crazed in some other way’. The fantasy seeks to resist reason, by depicting an enemy who is utterly beyond it.

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the slightest qualification. Hebrew, he said was made for prophetic utterance and divination.’ On the affective alterity of Hebrew in a medieval context, see Cohen 2003, 186–87. When I speak of ‘Orientalist’ imagery or ‘Orientalism’, I use the term with all the sensible caveats for medievalists laid down by Kim Phillips (2014, 6–27), particularly her reminder that ‘conspicuously absent from medieval western responses to Asia was the urge so familiar in more recent times: the desire to possess’. See also Akbari 2009, 5–11. The rub of the validity of the word Orientalism for describing medieval attitudes seems to me to be the enduring Graeco-Roman sentiment that the peoples of the east were variously effeminate, violent, martial and irrational.

<sup>5</sup> For a fourteenth-century example, see *WoA*, 85–97.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AMENABILITY TO ANTISEMITISM

And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. (Mark 4: 7–8)

The Gutnish-speaking proletariat, such as those who worshipped at St Michael's, must have felt relief when the finger of blame was pointed not at them, but at German speakers from St Olaf's. It is hard to imagine many in the disenfranchised Gutnish-speaking community, happy that nobody in their families had been implicated, pressing for further investigations to verify the wild accusations that had been made. Perhaps ordinary people stood in dreadful silence as they watched Tidericus burn, summoned there by the councillors and utterly unconvinced of the organist's guilt. That is a possibility which cannot be eliminated conclusively. Nonetheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that the two-Jewish-handlers-one-gentile-agent model was used repeatedly in Hanseatic towns. The repetition of this model indicates that it was considered to be a reliably acceptable explanation—or analgesic—for the horrors of the plague. Repeating it again and again apparently did not diminish its plausibility. Rather, it was said again and again *because it was considered plausible*.

But for whom was the charade intended: the administrators or their subjects? There is an obvious disingenuity in putting David-Mosseke-Keyenort from Lübeck next to an identically triadic Aaron-Moses-Tidericus in the very same letter. Doubtless Hanseatic administrators, like other medieval thinkers, entertained superstitions and prejudices which we would now find bizarre, but in a country without a Jewish population, it would be very difficult for rational, educated people (as Hansards tended to be) to convince themselves that they really were under attack from such a conspiracy, particularly given the number of false confessions it would have been necessary to extract under duress in order to support the hypothesis. Rather, I propose that the councillors' model for explaining plague was intended to explain what was happening, not to themselves, but instead to the ordinary, lower-class people of Visby;

that is to say, the people who might well otherwise be moved to rise up as the plague tore away at the social fabric. The emergence of the flagellants on the European continent had shown how a population terrified by the epidemic could quickly become ungovernable (Cohn 1970, 131–40; Cohn 2006, 21–17). Taking the contours of Gotland’s complex political situation into account, the risk of disorder must have looked even clearer.

If the administrators did sincerely believe in the fanciful drama that they peddled, it just so happened that they had alighted upon very convenient victims. By accusing the visiting ‘priests’ and the immigrant organ player of St Olaf’s, they targeted a transient portion of the lowest class German-speaking congregation in Visby. If they had picked somebody from the Gutnish-speaking population, they would have risked provoking unrest in the city, and perhaps even interference from the hostile, Gutnish-speaking countryside. Sincerity on the part of the Hansards in this project would therefore appear to be an impossibility. Instead, the Hanseatic élite strategically chose victims whom the Gotlanders would not rise up to protect, and whose status as immigrants and outsiders would have left them with nobody to take up their cause in the German-speaking community born on Gotland. Gutnish speakers may have been on the periphery of urban life, and thus easily ignored in day-to-day administration, but their connections to the antagonistic countryside would understandably have made the élite keen to get them on board in times of crisis. We have already seen that the Scandinavian setting of Letter B (Stockholm, Västerås and Arboga) can readily be interpreted as a clear manifestation of the desire to tailor the fantasy to Gotlandic tastes.

So much for the geography, but is there any reason to suspect that the antisemitic tropes of Letter B would have been attractive or plausible to Gutnish ears in their own right? Old Gutnish literature constitutes a rather slim corpus, limited to *Guta saga*, the *Guta lag* law code and a few runic monuments.<sup>1</sup> Despite its slowness, there is one example of an

<sup>1</sup> No runic monument refers directly to the events of 1350, though some do provide lively glimpses into the violent unrest of Late Medieval Gotland, contested between Gotlanders, Swedes, Danes and Low Germans, e.g. G 100 which commemorates the death of a Gutnish soldier from Mannegårde, fighting the Danish pirate king, Eric of Pomerania, an ardent enemy of the Hanseatic League: þinna sten : þa lit husfru ruþvi giera yfir sin bonda iakop i managardum sum skutin uarþ ihel miþ en : pyrsustin af uisborh þa en kunuung erik uar bestallaþ þa þi fornemda slot en þa uar lipit af guz byr(þ) fiurtan hundrap : ar ok ainu : ari minna þen : fem(t)igi : ar biþium þet : et guþ :



anti-Jewish attitude to be found there. DR 373 is the siglum of a runic inscription on a baptismal font from Aakirkeby on Bornholm, Denmark. The font was originally made in Gotland, c.1200, by one Master Sigreifr. The font has eleven panels, each carved with a scene from the life of Christ. Runic text in Gutnish accompanies each image (Inscription from Rundata 3.1):

**þitæ : ir : sænti gæbrel : øk : sehþi : sæntæ mæri(æ) : æt hæn skuldi :  
bærn : (f)ypæ : þitæ : ir : elisæþeþ : øk : mæriæ : øk : hæilsæs : hiær :  
huilis : mæriæ sum : hæn : bærn : fydi : skæperæ : himis : øk : iøþær  
: sum øs : leyst(i) þitæ : iru : þæir : þrir : kunugær : (s)um : (f)y(r)sti  
: giærþu : øfr : uærum : drøtni : hiær : tøk : (h)æn (u)(i)(þ)r : (k)(u)(n)  
(u)(g)æ : ø(f)ri : uær drøtin hiær : ripu : þæir : burt : þrir : kunugær :  
siþæn þæir : øfræ(t) : ---æ : (ø)rum : drøtni þæ ir : þet : hi(æ)(r) : fræm  
: s--(u) : (i)(ø)þær : tøk uærn : drøtin : øk -(N)(d)(-) : (-)(-)(N) : uip-  
-re : øk : (g)etu siþæn : lædu : (þ)(æ)ir : hæn : burt : þiæþN(n) : bundin  
øk : nehldu : hiær : iøþær : iesus : æ krus : si : fræm : æ þitæ sihræf(r)  
: (m)e--e-(i) :**

This is holy Gabriel who told holy Mary that she would give birth to a child. This is Elizabeth and Mary greeting each other. Here Mary is resting as she has given birth to a child, the creator of heaven and earth who redeemed us. This is the three kings, who first made offering to Our Lord. Here he accepted the kings' offerings. Here the three kings ride away, now that they have given offerings to Our Lord. Then, it jumps forwards in the story to here: The Jews took Our Lord and bound him to a piece of wood and stood guard over him. Then they led him away bound up, and here the Jews nailed Jesus to the cross. Look upon this. Master Sigreifr.

Here is the kernel of the most basic kind of anti-Judaism: the belief—widespread in the Middle Ages and still quite prevalent in our own time despite official repudiation by Christian authorities—that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. To return to our earlier discussion of domains of Judaeophobia, we can observe that Sigreifr's work (assuming he carved both the runic inscription and the images) conforms closely to the concerns grouped under anti-Judaism. The hostility towards Jews here

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**napi hanz sial ok allum krisnum sialum : amen** 'Rupvi the Housewife had this stone made in memory of her husband Jakop of Mannegårde, who was blown to pieces by a canon ball from Visby, when King Erik was holed up in the aforementioned fortress. And at that time fourteen hundred and one less than fifty years has passed since the birth of Christ. We pray that God received his soul, and all Christian souls. Amen.' Transcription taken from Rundata 3.1. This inscription is dated to 1449 and is discussed, largely for its linguistic content, by Barnes (2012, 100).



**Figure 3.** The Flagellation of Christ on the Aakirkeby font. Picture from *Romansk stenkunst* database.

is closely bound to a (mis)reading of the Gospels, with no commentary on contemporary Judaism, no association of the Jews with the occult, and certainly no depiction of the Jewish body as somehow aberrant. Master Sigreifr's Jews are depicted in much the same way as the other male characters on the font (fig. 3). Some are bearded, some are clean shaven, some wear armour. There are no hooked noses or other somatic markers of difference. These Jews would look quite inconspicuous alongside other famous examples of medieval Scandinavian art, such as the carvings of Eddic heroes at Hylestad stave church in Norway or the figures from Thorwald's Cross on the Isle of Man. Sara Lipton (2014, 1) writes that

for the first thousand years of the Christian era, there were no visible Jews in Western art. Manuscripts and monuments did depict Hebrew prophets, Israelite armies, and Judaic kings, but they were identifiable only by context, in no way singled out as different from other sages, soldiers, or kings.

What Lipton says of European art from before the year 1000 also seems to be true of Gotlandic art from c.1200. Sigreifr's lack of interest in visualising any notions of Jewish difference (if he subscribed to any such notions) denotes that his work belonged to a less complicated phase of Christian depiction of Jews than that of his Continental contemporaries. Martebo Church in northern Gotland also features stone sculptures of



**Fig. 4.** Carvings from Martebo church, c.1300. Photograph by Anders Andrén. Reproduced by kind permission of the photographer.

Jews torturing Christ.<sup>2</sup> These figures date from c.1300, so they would have been visible to Gotlanders who were alive in the summer of 1350. The Jews in the Martebo carvings are rather more clearly marked as ‘Other’ compared to the Aakirkeby font. They have cruel, scowling faces, and one figure sports a *pileus cornutus*, the pointy hat commonly associated with Jews in the medieval artistic imagination.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the case of Master Sigreifr, whose name and language identify him as a native Gotlander, the Martebo sculptures are thought to be the work of a foreigner, the so-called ‘Magister Egypticus’ (whose sobriquet is intended to denote his bold, exquisitely stylised technique). The Martebo sculptures are evocative, but still not nearly as exaggerated and racialised as some other artistic depictions of Jews from mainland Scandinavia. The *Judensau* from Uppsala Cathedral, for example (fig. 5), is part of a German tradition of depicting Jews suckling sows, carved around the same time that Tidericus died.<sup>4</sup> This is a world apart from Martebo and the work of Master Sigreifr. Our two Gotlandic carvings represent a step

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Anders Andrén for bringing this church art to my attention.

<sup>3</sup> On the valences of the pointed hat often worn in medieval images of Jews, and its probable lack of basis in actual Jewish costume, see Lipton 2014, 16–45.

<sup>4</sup> See also Hastrup 1999, 111–67. On the West Norse tradition of antisemitic art, see Cole 2015b, 252–63.



**Figure 5.** The *Judensau* at Uppsala Cathedral, c.1350. Are there three or four Jews pictured here? If four, then the Jew whose face is obscured behind the sow's thighs must be performing an obscene sexual act, sadly not unknown in the *Judensau* tradition. Other *Judensau* images feature Jewish caricatures examining the anus, drinking the urine, and worse. The Jew in the top right, tugging on the tail, is more ornately dressed and appears to wear a petalon. He may therefore be intended as a rabbi. The Jew who may be in a sexual act with the sow is naked, and his emaciation resonates with the antisemitic idea of Jews' bodies being sickly and frail. There is a horrid sense of motion to the scene, with the rabbi having lost his hat and one Jew helping another keep on his *pileus cornutus*. Photograph by Stephen Mitchell. Reproduced by kind permission of the photographer.

towards the kind of thinking which would be a prerequisite for the Visby burnings in 1350, but they are not themselves in the same league of visceral, orientalising, body-centric thinking about Jews as is found in Letters A and B.

While native Gutnish written sources (*Guta saga* and *Guta lag*) reflect nothing of the Jew-hating ideology which would underpin the events of 1350, the much more voluminous Old Swedish material is a different matter. It is obviously not the case that one can point to a specific Old Swedish text, suppose that it must have been known to Gotlanders, and declare that one has thereby found the pivotal moment at which a particular antisemitic trope became current in Gotland. Nonetheless, the flow of clerical personnel from mainland Sweden to insular Gotland, and the mutual intelligibility between Old Swedish and Old Gutnish, mean

that certain instances in Old Swedish literature must be at least *considered* as indicative of the kind of ideas which were probably available to the native Gotlanders. It is here that we are likely to find Ginzburg's 'culture imposed on the masses'. This is particularly true of sermons and the short miracle narratives, written in a vernacular and lively style, which would have been perfectly suited for use in preaching (and it is perhaps a little less true for Old Swedish works of a particularly Swedo-centric bent, such as the Swedish rhyming chronicles).<sup>5</sup> We can be almost certain that tales of Jewish perfidy would have been on the minds of ordinary Gotlanders, both Germanophone and Scandophone, around the time that Tidericus and his co-accused were arrested at Easter (*novem maleficos seu intoxicatores . . . a Pascha huc usque nobiscum deprehendisse*, Egb, 18).<sup>6</sup> As Miri Rubin (1999, 72) notes, 'Easter Week [by which Rubin probably means Holy Week] was . . . the season most likely to produce anti-Jewish riots or revelry, and much effort was invested by rulers in removing Jews from the streets on such days'.<sup>7</sup> This was a time of the

<sup>5</sup> The use of *miracula* in preaching (not just personal devotion) stands to reason. We have explicit evidence of this practice from medieval Scandinavia. One Icelandic miracle tale attests that *Pessa iartegnn var Pall byskup vannr at segia, þar sem hann var stadr Mæriv messv hina fyrri, en hann kvat segia ser Absalon erkibyskvp* 'Bishop Páll [r. 1195–1211] had the habit of telling this miracle when he was presiding over the Assumption, and he said it was told to him by Archbishop Absalon [r. 1178–1201]' (*Mar*, 153). Of particular relevance to the anti-Jewish tradition, it is worth noting that one Middle Norwegian Dominican sermon from c.1450 contains an iteration of the 'Jewish boy in oven' Marian miracle. Further work is required to ascertain whether it is derived from the Old Swedish, Old West Norse or simply Latin version of the miracle. See Seip 1934, 240–41. It is also known that Jacob of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (c.1275), upon which the majority of the Old Swedish miracle tradition depends, was itself widely used in preaching. See D'Avray 1985, 64–72. A recent survey of the interdependence between high and low culture in medieval preaching is provided by Powell 2010, esp. 172–74. See also Wagner 1999, cols 656–59. Some medieval Swedish manuscripts of *legendaria* contain annotations recommending certain readings during Compline (Schmid 1965, col. 412).

<sup>6</sup> Properly the accused have been arrested *a Pascha* i.e. 'from, since' Easter. However, this must be a circumlocution, because according to its own internal chronology, by the time the letter was written Tidericus and company were already burnt; the rounding-up of suspects, therefore, cannot have been an ongoing process.

<sup>7</sup> On Easter, liturgy and anti-Jewish violence, see also Bale 2010b, 155. A nuanced view of the preaching calendar, where the degree of anti-Judaism in the liturgy is not automatically matched by the accompanying sermon, is provided by Hanska 2015, 195–212. See also Nirenberg 1996, 200–30.

year where Christians meditated more than usually on the alleged cruelty of the Jews during the Passion. It is not possible to say with certainty precisely which prayers and sermons would have been heard in the churches of Visby during the Easter period of 1350 because no Old Gutnish preaching material survives and no fourteenth-century liturgical manuscripts from the East Norse area contain Easter liturgies. It is also difficult to reconstruct the liturgical practice of medieval Gotland via analogy with other extant traditions because, as Hilding Johansson (1993, 392) pointed out, in medieval Scandinavia

every diocese had its own rites and liturgy. The differences could be considerable . . . Liturgical uniformity in one and the same diocese was not reached until the end of the Middle Ages, when the liturgical books were printed.<sup>8</sup>

But while the Gotlandic liturgy is lost to us, the Old Swedish sermons at least provide an insight into the images of the supposed barbarity and treachery of the Jews in Jesus's day which would have been omnipresent in Visby—just as in any other Latin Christian town—during the Paschal season of 1350. If we restrict our reading only to sermons intended for delivery between Lent and Eastertide, we still find more than a few examples of aggression on the part of *the forbannadhe jödher* 'the accursed Jews'. Consider this excerpt from a sermon for the First Sunday after Ascension Day, which in 1350 would have fallen on 24th May ('Dominica post ascensionem', *SMP*, 163–64):

Oc then timme apostoli predicathe gudʒ nadha Judei huthstrugho somma aff them, swasom, sanctus paulus sigher oc steende the j hiel somma, swasom sanctum stephanum, oc somma halshugo the, swasom sanctum jacobum, Oc somma mʒ eet oc somma annat. Thetta giortha iötha widher apostolos, For thy at the haffdhe ey rät vndirstandilsse, oc gudhlek kännedom ther moyses them kendhe, Moyses spadhe aff thy, at ihesus sculde föthas aff jwthom, ok manadhe them ther til at the sculde oppa jhesum troo, ok lydha hans kennedom.

And at that time the apostles preached the grace of God. The Jews flayed some of them, as St Paul says, and they stoned some to death, such as St Stephen, and some they decapitated, such as St James. And to some they did some such thing and to some something else. The Jews did this to the apostles because they did not have the correct understanding and the divine teaching which Moses taught them. Moses prophesied that Jesus would be born to the

<sup>8</sup> Bale (2010a, 53) points to the citation of John 19:15 in the Good Friday liturgy: 'But they [the Jews] cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him.' I am grateful to Carl Phelpsstead for clarifying this point to me.



Jews, and insisted to them that they should believe in Jesus and listen to his teaching.

Or this for the Fifth Sunday of Easter (which in 1350 would have been 10th May), where the Jews are depicted as violent and irrational and it is only Jesus's *tholekhet* —a word conveying a sense between tolerance and strength—which prevents Him from responding in kind ('Dominica quinta in passione domini', *SMP*, 141–42):

Jödha sankadhe stena samman oc wilde stena war herra for thy at han lärðhe them gudhelekan kennedom J th3 tinde giffuer war herre os til effter syn ödmiukt oc tholekhet m3 thy at han gik wt fra the forbannadhe jödha, ther han matte them alla forderffuat m3 eet ordh, wm han haffdhe wiliat.

The Jews collected stones and wished to stone Our Lord because he taught them divine teaching. In this parable Our Lord gives us the example of gentleness and resilience with which he faced the accursed Jews, when he could have destroyed them all with one word if he had wished.

Although the cases cited above are unpleasant, it must be stressed that there is nothing in the Old Swedish Easter sermon corpus which is particularly original or sophisticated in the anti-Jewish message offered. There are simple depictions of the Jews as violent, stubborn or treacherous, but these crude cartoons alone convey nothing more than the most basic kernel of anti-Judaism. Just as we saw with the similarly primitive (from a discursive perspective) Aakirkeby font, accepting the idea that the Jews of the New Testament were antagonistic towards Christ and the apostles is arguably a *sine qua non* for constructing the fantasy we find in our Hanseatic letters. However, that belief alone is a far cry from believing that the Jews of those present are members of a secret society, tattooed with Hebrew letters, who have engaged an itinerant organ player and some wandering preachers to poison the congregation of one's local church.

The Old Swedish legends appear to be a richer source than the Old Swedish sermons for the thought patterns which are prerequisites for the kind of actions which were taken in Visby that summer. Like much of the medieval Nordic miracle tradition, they are mostly drawn from the *Legenda Aurea*, sometimes via intermediaries like the thirteenth-century *Sächsische Weltchronik* (Tjäder 1993, 454). A full study of anti-Jewish and antisemitic thought in this corpus would necessitate a much larger work than the present book (and such a work is well under way thanks to Jonathan Adams's project 'Muslims and Jews in Medieval Scandinavian Texts'). However, if one were to choose a particularly demonstrative example, the Old Swedish tale of St Silvester would

be a fine choice. The story is originally known from the *Acta Silvestris* (400s) before its incorporation by Jacob of Voragine in the thirteenth century. The Old Swedish version from which I will shortly quote is from a manuscript dated to the early 1400s (the Codex Bildstenianus), but which is usually taken to represent translations made no later than 1312 (Tjäder 1993, 454). In the following scene, St Silvester has undertaken a public disputation-cum-religious-magical-duel with the Jews of Rome. One by one, Silvester quickly dispatches his Jewish opponents, leading to a dramatic face-off with the rabbi Zambri. The story is attested in several versions both in West and East Norse, and its popularity in church paintings and stained-glass windows on the Continent suggest its importance in lay devotion in other medieval cultures too.<sup>9</sup> In this scene the last disputant, Zambri, attempts a double or bust gambit. He will kill a raging bull, by whispering the secret name of his god into its ear ('Om det Heliga Korset', *FSL*, 85–86):

han het zambri han øpte siluestrum yfri(ktt) ordoghan vara ok (kiæpt) hardan / ok enghin til nokra gerninga / oc bødþ sik (i) enwighe m3 hanum til maktogha gerningh ok sagdhe sit kunna eeth gud3 nampn swa maktukt at biærghin springa en th3 lifuandis hørt) ok th3 wil iak prøwa lætin hiit ledha (grymmastan oc villastan) thiwr ok en han dør widh at iak hwiskar namnit j hans ør(ona) ok gitir æy siluester swa giordh wid anna(tn) tha ær han wnni(tn)[.] Siluester spurde huru gat(e) thu numit th3 nampn som ænghin gate hørt lifuandis / zambri swarade owerdogher ær thu th3 at wita . som ær iudha owin. Siluester bødþ fram ledha thiwrin ok kom fram swa grymber . at mange mæn gato hanum warla styrt ok fiol dødher widh iordh fōr3ta zambri swiskade namnit j hans øron tha øpte iudha . ok sagdho sik sigher hafua wnnit en siluester gate ey samulundh giordh[.] Siluester sagdhe værsta diæwls nampn næmde zambri ok ey gu3 ok th3 wil iak prøfua Gudh s(ac)g (dhe hir) siæluir iak dræper ok (kan jak) liiff gifu(a ir) / wm thænna thiwrin do for gu3 nampn tha gifui ok hanum liiff m3 thy sama nampne zambri sagde hwaghin thera th3 gita giort (oc badh siluestrum oc louadhe alle iudha [cri] sne vardh en han tiwren upreste.

<sup>9</sup> There are two West Norse iterations. One is in *Silvesters saga* (*Hms*, 270, cf. alternative recension on pp. 280–86). A remarkable retelling which largely scrubs the legend of its anti-Judaism can be found in *Kgs*, 71. For a full examination of the difference between the *Konungs Skuggsjá* and *Silvester saga* versions, see Cole 2015c, 207–12. Examples of the Zambri scene in church art include a stained-glass window from Chartres Cathedral (early 1200s), a wall painting in the basilica of *Santi Quattro Coronati* (c.1250) and an altar panel by Francesco Pesellino (1450s), of Italian provenance but now held by the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts.



His name was Zambri. He cried out wildly that Silvester was worthless and yelled harshly, and that he knew nothing of magic, and he invited himself into a showdown of powerful magic with him, and said he knew a name of God so powerful that the mountains and living men alike would burst apart when they heard it, 'and I will prove it. Have brought here the fiercest and wildest bull, and he will die as soon as I whisper the name in his ear, and Silvester will have no choice then; he will be defeated.' Silvester asked how it could be that he had learned this name which no living man could have heard. Zambri replied, 'You are not worthy to know, as you are an enemy of the Jews.' Silvester had a bull led forth, and one was brought out that was so fierce that even many men could hardly control it, and it fell dead to the ground as soon as Zambri whispered the name in its ear. Then the Jews cried out and declared themselves to have won, as Silvester could not have done the same. Silvester said that it was the worst name of the devil that Zambri had uttered and not a name of God, 'and I will prove it. God told you yourselves, "I kill and I can give life" [1 Samuel 2:6, Job 1:21]. If this bull died from God's name then give it life with the same name.' Zambri said there was no way it could be done, and asked Silvester to do it, and all the Jews promised to become Christians if he resurrected the bull.

It will come as no surprise that Silvester succeeds. For our purposes, an important quality shared between this legend and Letter B is the taste for orientalism, particularly concerning the Hebrew language. The names of the Jewish disputants are either taken from the Old Testament, e.g. Benjamin, Jonas, Godolais (Jeremiah 40:9), or they are simply gibberish, e.g. Abiater, Kuse, Zambri. With the exception of Jonas, none of these were names used by medieval Swedes or Gotlanders, so far as documentary sources show. They would have conveyed an impression of alterity, rooted as much in the actual foreign names of the Old Testament as in the imaginary 'oriental' medieval image of the east, a mental landscape for medieval Latin Christians which Suzanne Conklin Akbari (2009, 3) characterises as 'a place of enigma and mystery, including strange marvels and monstrous chimeras . . . the place of origins [but] also the place of the future apocalypse'. The tale also communicates the related notion of Jews as bearers of occult knowledge, and their language, Hebrew, as the vessel for that knowledge. The Silvester legend is obviously not the point of entry for this sentiment: medieval Scandinavians were as well acquainted as any other European Christians with the tradition that God had many epithets in Hebrew, and that uttering some of them had magical potency. There are multiple runic inscriptions which attempt Hebrew divine names, although very few of them are from the East Norse-speaking sphere.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On the divine name tradition in Old Icelandic, see Foote 1984, 121–39. On the runic tradition, see Cole 2015a, 33–78.

Some laymen in medieval Visby may well have had a shared (if fanciful) image in their minds' eyes of the conspirators' Greek and Hebrew tattoos. As Lipton (2014, 273) notes, 'Hebrew—or more typically, pseudo-Hebrew—lettering decorating the garb of many Jewish characters in Passion images evokes these “occult” aspects of Judaism' (see also Melinkoff 1993, 97).

The orientalising of Hebrew seen in the Old Swedish *miraculum* cited above is far from unique in the wider corpus of medieval European literature and art. But, of course, the unoriginality of this tale—and indeed of any antisemitic or anti-Jewish material in a medieval Scandinavian language—should not influence our discussion; the point is that the legend marks the presence in the East Norse-speaking sphere of a particular way of thinking about Jews. It is partly to a mental turning away from Hebrew as a sacred language, and towards Hebrew as a tool of magic and conspiracy. If one counts the concoction of poisons as a species of magic, as Trachtenberg (1966, 97–98) argues that medieval thought very often did where Jews were concerned, a further shared trope between the Silvester legend and Letter B becomes apparent. In the *Weltanschauung* shared by our Old Swedish story and Letter B, Jews are a cabal, held together by false assumptions (being *quasi deliri et aliquid insensati* in one case and believing the *værsta dæwls namn* to be the name of God in the other), capable of magic and fiercely hostile to Christianity.

We will quote one final case from the Old Swedish miracle-tale corpus, although it must be stressed that this particular miracle could not have been known to anyone in 1350 in the form in which it is now attested. St Catherine of Louvain was an obscure regional saint venerated in Liège, who lived in the thirteenth century (Dunbar 1904, 150–51). St Catherine was born into a Jewish family as Rachel, who subsequently converted to Christianity and became a nun, hence her alternative name, St Rachel. A short Old Swedish account of her life is found in Cod. XXXIX. Kyl. The manuscript is from c.1525, although the translation itself was most likely by Nicolaus Ragvaldi (d. 1514), undertaken at some point during his tenure at Vadstena Abbey, which began in 1476. We can say little about his lost exemplar. It is not impossible that it was present in Sweden in the middle of the fourteenth century; the library at Vadstena was the largest in Scandinavia at that time, and it is logical to suspect that Nicolaus might have found his source text there a century later. Arne Bengtson (1947, 48–50) categorises the translation as one of those which has Latin parallels in manuscripts or incunabula owned by Vadstena, but notes

that the Old Swedish text diverges from the surviving Latin models to a degree that precludes secure identification. There is no guarantee that Nicolaus did not acquire the original abroad, or that it did not arrive at Vadstena by some other route during the 1400s. We will return to the hermeneutic problem of using a source such as this shortly, but for now let us consider its actual content. In this scene St Catherine has arrived in Liège,

hwar biskoppen haffdhe samman kallat ena märkelika samqwämdh[:] prel-  
 atha, doctores, oc laghakloka män, badhe andelika oc wärldzlika, oc en storan  
 mogha mz jwdhom[. T]ha fram ropadhes prästen reynerus för rätten[. H]an  
 gik fram för domen, oc syster katerina gik hart när klärken, oc begynnadhe  
 först tala, oc taladhe gudhelika om the hälga tro, mz san skäl oc bewisnigh aff  
 the hälge skriff, swa beskedhelika oc sannelika oc wisleka, at enghen dirffdes  
 driffwa hennas ordh til rygga, oc dreff hon jwdhana tilbaka mz theras wantro,  
 görandhes them stora blygdh[.] Alla cristne ther när warandhes, opplyffto sin  
 änlike i hymelen, loffuandes gudh, oc sagdho alle mz en mwn[: ‘]wisseleka  
 talar then hälge ande i the systrenne[. H]aa kan wiislekare tala än hon nw talat  
 haffuer[?]’. Än jwdhane konno henne enkte swara, wtan stodho gratandhes  
 oc tywtandhes i hymellen som en wargha hoper oc war theras ropp oc toth  
 swa hökt at the hördhos til sancti lamberti kirkio hwilken ganzska lankt ligher  
 fran domkyrkionne i leodio[.] Her äpther waro jwdhane fridhsamme i thu aar,  
 rådhandes at om katerina skulle nakot ythermera komma til disputeran, tha  
 wordho manghe wisselika aff jwdhomen fran wändhe theras willo, Oc betänkt  
 sik om eth lönluket swek ällar förrädilse, i swadana matto her äpther fölgher[:]  
 I them thimanom war i blandh jwdhana en wänašte wngher man, wilkom  
 jwdhane gaffuo ena stora swmmo gull at han skulle swika hälga iomffruna  
 syster katerinam[.] Thenne wnghe mannen kom sik til clostrit, hwar iomffrun  
 war, sighiandis sik henne wara när skyldher, ällar henna nästa frändhe, oc  
 sagdhe sik wara mykyt gladhan aff thy at hon haffde widhertakit cristne troo  
 oc wnfanghit cristelik döpile, oc bedhes thy ödhmywklika i ihesu nampn at  
 wardha cristen, oc döpas mz cristnom, än han giordhe alt thzta skrömtelika,  
 oc ekki rätfärdelika[.] Sidhan bedhes han nakon then som honom kwnne lära  
 grwndhen i the hälge cristne troo[. H]onom tilskepadhes godha gudelike män  
 oc han ländhe aff them mykyt goth oc tho alt fäfänglika, ty at hans akt war ey  
 rätfärdhog[.] Tha badh han ödhmyuklika, at hans kära fränka katerina matte til  
 honom komma[. H]an sagdhe sik henne kwnna bäst wndhersta[.] Tha katerina  
 fik wetha hans begärlse, nekadhe hon allaledhes wilia til honom gaa[. H]enne  
 wart budhit wndher gudz lydhno, oc sagdhe hon än tha ne[. S]krefftefadhren  
 hennas straffadhe henne för olydhnona[.] Tha kwngiordhe hon i sin skrifftemal,  
 at henne wart oppenbarat aff them hälga anda lönluka, at then wnghe mannen  
 tok döpseln skrömtelika oc ekki rätfärdelika, oc thy lydde hon ekki sinom  
 förmanne wetandhes gudhz wilia[.] Tha jwdhane hördho then wnghe mannen  
 haffua enghen framgang mz sith sik, wändho the igän aff sinne wranghe akt,

enkte meer hálga iomffrwna omakandis, oc wnghe mannen bleff i sinne willo,<sup>11</sup>  
som iomffrunne oppenbaradhes aff gudhi[.] ('Om Sankt Rachel', *FSL*, 439–41)

[Catherine and the Bishop come to Liège] where the bishop had convoked a strange colloquium: prelates, doctors and legal experts, both spiritual and secular, and a great mass of Jews. Then the priest Reynier called out before the court. He went before the judge, and Sister Catherine quickly followed the cleric, and first began to speak, and spoke divinely about the holy faith, with true sense and evidence from the holy scripture, so convincingly and truly and wisely, that no one dared to contradict her words, and she drove back the Jews with their heresy, making them greatly ashamed. All the Christians nearby listened, turned their faces to the sky, praised God and all said with one mouth: 'Certainly, the holy spirit speaks through this sister. Who can speak more wisely than she has just spoken?' And the Jews had nothing to reply to her, except for standing crying and screeching at the sky as a wolf howls, and their voices and noises were so loud that they were heard all the way to the church of St Lambert, which is a very long way away from the cathedral in Liège.<sup>12</sup> After this the Jews were quiet for a while, fearing that if Catherine should continue with the disputation then many of the Jews would surely turn away from their heresy, and they thought up a secret trick or treachery, which went as follows: at that time there was amongst the Jews a most handsome young man, to whom the Jews gave a large amount of gold to trick the holy virgin, Sister Catherine. This young man came to the convent, where the virgin was, saying that he should be near her, or [that he was] her nearest kinsman, and saying that he was very happy that she had accepted the Christian faith and received Christian baptism, and then asking humbly in the name of Jesus to become Christian [himself], and to be baptised with the Christians, but he did all this disingenuously and not righteously. Then he asks for someone who

<sup>11</sup> As a rule—though there are quite a few exceptions, such as the present one—both East Norse and West Norse authors prefer not to describe Judaism as a heresy (Old Swedish *willa*, Old Icelandic *villa*, lit. 'going astray'). This reflects the theological position that while Islam was a heresy because it was believed (erroneously) to have originated as a divergence from Christianity, the same could not be said of Judaism, as it had predated Christianity and therefore could not be an aberrant offshoot thereof. Words such as Old Swedish *wantro*, Old Icelandic *vantrú*, or Old Danish *utro*, Old Icelandic *ótrú*, 'vain faith' or 'faithlessness' are more usual descriptors. (In Old West Norse *villa ok vantrú* was combined as an alliterative pair, though so far as I can see always to describe heresy proper, rather than other religions such as Judaism or Islam.) The use of *willa/villa* to denote Judaism may indicate that a given text was intended for a lower register, e.g. preaching to the laity, where strict doctrinal exactitude was less important than compelling invective.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, St Lambert's was the cathedral in medieval Liège.

could teach him the foundations of the holy Christian faith. He is assigned good and holy men and he learned many good things from them, although all in vain because his conduct was not righteous. Then he humbly asked that his dear kinswoman Catherine should come to him. He said he could best understand her. When Catherine got to know his desires, she refused outright to go to him. She was ordered to under obedience to God, and she still said no. Her confessor punished her for disobedience. Then she made it known in her confession that it had secretly been revealed to her by the holy spirit that the young man received baptism disingenuously and not righteously, and therefore she did not listen to her superior, knowing God's will. When the Jews heard that the young man had made no progress, they relented with their deceitful actions, never again troubling the Holy Virgin, and the young man stayed in his heresy, which had been revealed to the virgin by God.

There are several details in this episode which resonate with the kind of thinking demonstrated in the Visby affair. In a further development of the simple depictions of 'Jews as plotters' in Luke 22 or Matthew 12, to which we alluded previously, the Jews in this legend exhibit a degree of cunning dissimulation. At first they make bestial noises, seemingly ruled by their wild emotions (itself a classic medieval antisemitic trope; see Sapir-Abulafia 1994, 128–29; Adams 2012, 88–89; Cuffel 2009, 263 n. 49; Scheil 2004, 39–46). They recover their composure, however, realising that they must put on an appearance of being *fridhsamme* 'quiet, calm, peaceable' lest they harm their cause any further. They also display an aptitude for subterfuge, employing an undercover agent to infiltrate a Christian religious house—although, unlike Tidericus, the agent is himself a Jew. In this regard, the Jews of the St Catherine legend and the conspirators of Letter B constitute a paradox: at once emotionally/intellectually unstable *and* master schemers. (As an aside, one might note that a similar paradox has emerged in our own times regarding Islamic terrorism; the stereotypical Muslim terrorist is imagined as hysterically ululating, crying out religious exhortations or beating his/her chest at the funerals of martyrs, and also to be fearsomely devious, dissimulating their true beliefs in order to gain access to Western countries and to infiltrate Western institutions.)

The bodily concerns of antisemitism are also somewhat more developed here than in our previous examples. The narrator notes in passing that the agent is *en wānaste wñgher man* 'a most handsome young man'. Were it not for this detail, one would reasonably assume that the aim of the plot was to kidnap Catherine by force. But perhaps the agent's attractive appearance is intended to imply that the aim is, if possible, to seduce her. This primitive cartoon of a sexually predatory Jew is obviously a far

cry from the twentieth-century antisemite's worries that blonde-haired, blue-eyed gentile women might fall prey to the advances of lecherous Jews. But medieval narratives such as the above are the earliest ancestors of those worries. At the very least, stories such as these mark a palpable shift away from a theoretical sort of anti-Judaism ('if I ever met a Jew, I would find his theological beliefs highly distasteful') to a more engaged antisemitism ('I have never met a Jew, but they are out there in places such as Liège, and they are clearly very dangerous'). This is precisely the shift which was necessary in order for the conspiracy theory of 1350 to be concocted, and to be accepted.

At the close of this chapter, it must be stressed once more that none of the specific Old Swedish episodes which we have examined can be integrated into the chain of events which led Tidericus and his co-accused to the pyre. There is no direct evidence for the presence of any of these stories in manuscript form or oral delivery (i.e. preaching) on Gotland. But if the antisemitic tradition in Old Swedish cannot provide us with any smoking guns, it can at least equip us with a sort of barometer: indications of what thoughts were thinkable in the East Norse-speaking world during the Middle Ages. One may quibble at the somewhat apologetic narrative that antisemitic ideas were 'imported' to Gotland, but on the basis of these indicators it stands to reason that Benedictow (2004, 178) is quite correct to suggest that the seeds of the Visby burning might be found in 'religious legends'.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TIDERICUS'S FINAL MOMENTS

One of the most striking qualities in Letters A and B is that, alongside their delirious antisemitism, another sober and plausible story remains legible. Reading Letter B in particular, one gets the sense of an eyewitness account. It would not at all be surprising if the man who originally wrote Letter B, before it was copied in Rostock, was present at the burning of Tidericus. Burnings were major public events, orchestrated with performance in mind. I know of no burning-at-the-stake from the Middle Ages which took place behind closed doors. The execution would have been a demonstration to all Visbyers that the culprits of the poisoning had been caught and brought to justice. It therefore seems unlikely that the Hanseatic councillors and their entourages would have been so uninterested as not to attend.

What I wish to propose now is a reading which accepts Letter B's account of the burning as wholly faithful. It goes without saying that none of the preposterous charges could be rooted in reality, but as I hope to show, the account of the execution itself has the ring of truth to it—though, of course, we will never be completely sure. The nine accused men were probably burnt simultaneously and possibly on the same pyre or, say, three people per pyre (as building, stoking, extinguishing and rebuilding a pyre for each sequentially would have consumed a large amount of time and labour). Facing one of the most painful and terrifying means of death for a living thing, it is not hard to imagine the pleas and prayers, the cursing and the bitter lamentations which must have issued forth from the lips of the accused. But the last words attributed to Tidericus are rather different: *Ultimatim dixit: Nescio plura vobis dicere, sed tota christianitas est per Judeos et pessimos nos intoxicata* 'In his last moment he said "Need I say more? All Christendom has been poisoned by us villains and the Jews."'

It would be entirely reasonable to assume that the Letter B clerk put those incriminating words into Tidericus's mouth. Confessions had already been extracted, most likely under torture in light of the case of Lübeck from Letter A, but having one of the alleged conspirators unashamedly admit guilt and implicate Jews would have further

legitimated the story for posterity. By the same token, there are also reasons to suspect that Tidericus really did say those words before he died. True, from the perspective of our clerk it would be nice for the sake of record if Tidericus confessed at the stake—but that was a battle that was already won. Hanseatic administrators either did not really believe the accusations they made against people like Tidericus in Visby and Keyenort in Lübeck, or they already believed them long before the sentence was carried out. Presumably, then, the point of the public burnings during the Black Death was to convince the general population, not the Latinate class of letter-writing officials (hence the aforementioned performative quality of the punishment). What would have suited the councillors of Visby most of all is if Tidericus really did confirm the whole fantasy from the flames.

Under torture, people will admit to anything. Once it is obvious they will be killed regardless of what they say and do, people are less inclined to do as they are commanded. How do you get a man who has already been tied to a stake to say what you want? This is a problem faced by corrupt regimes of any time or place. The solution is to lie to the victim after they have either been sentenced to death or that sentence seems unavoidable. A sham deal is proffered. The interrogator admits to being in need of the victim's compliance. If the victim continues not to comply (i.e. by maintaining their innocence) then they will be killed. If the victim does comply, then the interrogator says he will still press ahead with the death sentence, but at the last moment it will be called off and the victim will be released. The interrogator sets this up as a tough but fundamentally rational deal: the interrogator will get their clear admission of guilt or whatever other complicity they require. The victim will be humiliated, but they will escape with their life. Scared, tortured and facing execution, the victim usually accepts the deal. The last-minute mercy is then not delivered by the interrogator, but by then it is too late for the victim to resist before they are killed. The tactic is common to any oppressive regime: It is probably the reason that many prominent Russian politicians publicly admitted their guilt during Stalin's show trials (Hansen 1956, 102–05; Lenoe 2010, 288–89, 313). A similar tactic of questionable plea-bargains has been used in the Guantánamo Bay detention centre, albeit without execution as the final outcome (Paik 2016, 180–83).

Such a deal might well have been put to Tidericus. It would have delivered just what the Hanseatic councillors wanted: a demonstration performed before all Visbyers—both German and Gutnish—that it was the Jews and their agents who were to be attacked in times of crisis, not



the Hansa men who actually ran the city. If Tidericus was being duped into playing the role of a poisoner, it would also account for the slightly strange form of his last words. I have chosen to represent *nescio plura vobis dicere* with the colloquial English idiom: 'What more can I say?' Heß (2015a, 118) opts for 'I do not know more things to tell you', which reflects *nescire* rather better, though my translation seeks to convey the sense of desperation in Tidericus's voice. The key sense seems to me to be the question 'What more do I need to say to you?' One wonders if Tidericus had not cried out in desperation something like Middle Low German *wat soll ik sāgen ū mēr*? Desperate and confused, he was asking his captors how much more emphatically he needed to proclaim his guilt before he was rescued from the flames as promised. We might well also believe the last words attributed to one of the preachers:

Cetereum percipitur,<sup>1</sup> quod inter predictos novem duo fuerunt, qui se pro sacerdotibus reputaverunt, qui deteriora omnibus prefatis fatebantur. Sed cum debuit poni ad ignem, dixit singulariter unus horum: Tota christianitas perdita est, nisi divinitus medicetur, quia vobis cavere debetis pro sacerdotibus et religionis aliis quibuscunque

Furthermore, it was also discovered that amongst the aforementioned nine there were two who thought of themselves as priests, who admitted to the worst deeds of them all. And when one of them was put on the fire, he said in his last hour: 'All Christendom is lost, unless a cure comes from the Heavens, because you ought to beware of the words of priests and other religious people!'

The nameless 'priest' cannot have been hoodwinked as I have suggested that Tidericus was. The limit of the trick is that once a victim has seen their co-accused confess and be killed anyway, they have no reason to suspect that their own deal will end any differently. Naturally, the possibility that Letter B's report of the burnings is entirely fabricated remains present, but there is a sound reading to be made to the contrary. If the priest really did cry out words to the effect of 'you ought to beware of the words of priests and other religious people!', then the Letter B clerk would have fortuitously found a meaning there which was amenable to the official narrative. When those words are presented in the context of Letter B, the meaning would appear to be that the priest was moved to join the Jewish conspiracy because he wished to destroy the Christian church (while the reality is that the vast majority of anti-clericalists thought they were purifying Christian ritual, not undermining it). The priest's last words are

<sup>1</sup> *Percepitur* emended from *percepit* by Wehrmann (*CdL*, 106); accepted silently by Aili (*Egb*, 18).

thus coloured as an admission of guilt, albeit not as starkly as those of Tidericus. The case of Henry Suso (d. 1366) shows anti-clericalism and antisemitism intermingling in a not altogether dissimilar constellation, around the same time as the Visby burnings. Here, Suso (a Dominican, itinerant preacher, and a disciple of Master Eckhardt) reproduces the testimony of a travelling companion who had accused him of being an agent in Jewish employ (*DeS*, 75–76):<sup>2</sup>

‘dem hat der orden bevoln giftseklú, die sol er in die brunnen versenken hin und her unzint gen Elsas abhun, da er iez hin wil, und wil alles daz verunreinigen mit böser gift, da er hin kumt. Lûgent daz er ûh bald werde, ald er stift daz mord, daz niemer me geheilet: und hat iez ein sekli her us genomen und hat es in den dorfbrunnen getan, dar umbe daz alle die, die her koment ze markte, müssin sterben, alle die des brunnen trinket . . . Und ze einem urkünd. daz ich war sagen, so sond ir wüssen, daz er hat einen grossen büchsak, der ist vol dero giftseklin und vil guldirn, die er und der orden von den Juden hein empfangen, uf daz daz [sic?] er dis mort volbringe.’ Do dis red erhorte das wild gesind und alle, die dar umb stünden und hin zû waren gedrunge, do tovten si und schrúwen mit luter stimme: ‘hin bald über den morder, daz er úns nit endrúnne!’ Eine kripfte einen spiess, der ander ein mordax. und ieder man als er mohte, und lúfen mit wilden tobenden siten. und stiessen dú húser uf und kloren und wa sú in wanden vinden.

‘The [Dominican] order has given little pouches of poison to him [Suso], which he is supposed to drop into wells here and there on the way to Alsace, which is where he’ll be going, and everywhere he goes he will pollute with foul poison. Watch out that you get him soon, or there will be murders for which there’ll be no cure. And he brought one pouch here too, and he has put it in the village well, so that all those who come to the market and drink from the well will die . . . And there is a testament that what I am saying is true, which is that he has a large sack of books which is full of poison pouches<sup>3</sup> and guldirners [large coins, worth multiple groats], which he and the order have received from the Jews in order for him to commit these crimes.’ When the unruly mob and everyone standing around and listening heard this then they became enraged and screamed with loud voices: ‘Quickly, after the murderer, for we mustn’t let him get away!’. One person seized a pike, another a battle-axe, and every man what he could. And they ran about in a wild, enraged fashion, and broke into houses and monasteries and wherever they thought they might find him.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Claire Jones for first bringing Suso’s experience to my attention. It is also discussed in connection with the Visby affair by Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen (2014, 72).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the *bursiculis* given to Tidericus in Letter A.

On first inspection of the Visby affair, the suggestion that Christian *sacerdotes* were supposed to be serving a Jewish conspiracy seems to be the most audacious aspect of the Hansa men's accusation. But Suso's vivid account is exemplary of how readily anti-Jewish and anti-clerical (in Suso's case, probably specifically anti-mendicant) sentiments could hybridise. Both forms of thought were often demotic, promising the poor that they were rising up against a powerful, affluent clique rather than persecuting a minority. Michael Gelting (2005, 83) has pointed out that from the perspective of an illiterate layman both Jews and Christian priests could be seen as guardians of arcane languages and lore—a point amply demonstrated by the Greek and Hebrew tattoos of the imaginary secret society. Anti-mendicantism in particular also shared with anti-Judaism a base repudiation of the outsider.

It may well have suited the Hansards to encourage this opinion. Wandering popular preachers could be threatening to city administrators, particularly if they drew too much on the many instances in the New Testament where the rich are castigated, and the sharing of wealth with the downtrodden is recommended (Cohn 1970, 37–41).<sup>4</sup> The distinctly proletarian makeup of St Olaf's congregation would perhaps have led the Visby councillors to view them as a liability during plague outbreaks—certainly, it is worth noting that the two travelling preachers seem to have chosen to attach themselves to the church of the Low German-speaking proletariat: the section of Visby's poor whose language they spoke. As Cohn (1970, 37, 131–39) has illustrated so vividly, revolutionary apocalyptic ardour frequently accompanied the Black Death. If fanatics were to spring up amongst the lower ranks in Visby, the councillors may well have reasoned that it was better that they should do so at the instigation of the Hanseatic hegemony, and pursue carefully selected enemies. One suspects that as the plague swept across the city, the preacher who cried out from the flames found himself burnt before the very people he had hoped to inspire with his subversive message.

<sup>4</sup> One might cite any number of verses from the gospels to demonstrate this point, but Acts 2:44–45, 4:34–35, Matthew 5:3–10, 19: 24, 25: 31–46 seem to me to be particularly pertinent.

## CHAPTER SIX

### WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN: THE THREAT OF VIOLENT DISORDER IN HANSEATIC COLONIES

If we accept the proposition that the Hansards did not really believe the far-fetched fantasies they peddled, do we replace one conspiracy theory with another? Instead of the conspiracy theory that ‘Tidericus and the others caused the plague’, are we offering the conspiracy that ‘the councillors cynically framed Tidericus’? Lest we err too much on the side of anti-Hanseatic polemic, then, it is important to remember that the Low-German-speaking merchants of northern Europe themselves often belonged to ethnic minorities, and at times of social turmoil, if they were not pulling the strings, they sometimes became the victims (Dollinger 1970, 182–83).

In this regard, the situation in Visby is arguably more closely comparable with Hanseatic outposts such as Steelyard in London or Bryggen in Bergen than it is with the Hanseatic mother-cities in northern Germany. It is true that in terms of governance Visby closely resembled Lübeck, with a mercantile council operating largely unchecked by ecclesiastical or royal power, but unlike in Lübeck nearly half the population would have spoken a language other than Low German. In a sense, Visby was an island within an island: a stone-walled bubble of the Northern-German way of life, where perhaps as many as forty-five percent of the population spoke the language of—and sometimes sympathised with—the people on the other side of the wall. Unlike the typical Lübecker, the Germanophone Visbyter must have been aware of the ever-present possibility that their city might fall to Gotlandic or Swedish dominion, losing all trace of its political independence and culture, and perhaps doing so with much bloodshed. There are several examples from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of other Hanseatic settlements outside of Germany falling victim to violence from a disaffected indigenous population.<sup>1</sup> It has been proposed in some popular histories that during

<sup>1</sup> Better known in Swedish history is an instance of violence by Low Germans against Swedes from 1389, the K  pplinge Murders (*K  pplingemorden*). The attack is detailed in only one source and has attracted controversy (Weibull 1964). It came at a time when German Stockholmers were supporting King Albert of Sweden (r. 1364–1389), while many of the Swedish elite favoured Queen Margaret (r. Denmark

the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, the Hansards were subjected to a shibboleth test (Kurlansky 2011, 26; cf. Durant 1935, 619). One Middle-English London chronicle (*CoL*, 15) records that

In this same yere the xj day off Juyn affter Trinite Sondag was the Rysynge off the Comyns off Ingelond ayenst the lordes; at which tyme they byheeded the Erchebysshop off Canterbury at the Toure hylle, And sir Robert Hales, priour off Seint Johns. And many flemmynges loste here heedes at that tyme, and namely they that koude nat say Breede and Chese, But Case and Brode.

Erik Spindler (2012, 59–78, esp. 70; cf. Murray 2013, 187) has convincingly argued that these 'flemmynges' really were from Flanders, not Hansards at all, although the medieval English tendency to refer to other Germanic speakers in somewhat vague terms means that the matter cannot be decisively settled. But more concrete examples abound of Low German traders falling foul of popular sentiment during episodes of unrest. A revolt by Germans in Kraków was put down in 1312, and retribution took the form of mobs murdering anybody who could not pronounce certain Polish words particularly difficult for Germanophones to master (Scales 2007, 286).<sup>2</sup> A later source records that *et qui nesciebant dicere soczovycza, kolo, mylye mlyn decolati sunt omnes* 'and those who did not know how to say *soczovycza* "lentil", *kolo* "wheel", *mylye mlyn* "mill" were annihilated' (*MPH*, 133). A case from Sluis in Flanders vividly records a near-genocidal attack in 1436 on the *Oesterlinghe* 'Easterlings', i.e. the town's Hanseatic inhabitants (*KvV*, 39):<sup>3</sup>

Daer quam een Vlaminc, eens poorters cnape van der Sluus, ende gheckede ende boerdeerde met den Oesterlinghen, ende uut dien soe spraken him de Oesterlinghe weder schimpelyken toe, ende deden desen Vlaminc wechgaen, ende dese Vlaminc haeldi iiij oft v goede ghesellen ende trac ten huuze, daer hy wiste dat een van desen Oesterlinghen by sinen boel te bedde gegaen was; daer ghinghen sy slaen, ende steeken up de dore end up de veinsteren van den huus. De Oesterlinc dit verhoerende ghinc staen ter solder veinsteren, roupende ende makende geschal, soe dat someghe van sinen ghesellen hoerende 't geruchte, quam hem te hulpen, roepende: 'Slaet den croeden Vlaminc doot.'

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1387–, Sweden 1389–1412). Even though in this case Low Germans were killing Swedes, the severity of the German action can be interpreted as evidence for a tendency for the Low German diaspora to view inter-ethnic conflict as a zero-sum game. This tendency does not preclude that at other times Hansa men and their hosts could demonstrate solidarity (Burkhardt 2005, 144–47).

<sup>2</sup> There is some disagreement over when the revolt and the recriminations took place, see Strzelczyk 1993, 213–14.

<sup>3</sup> See also *RCF*, 48.

Daer was zeere ghevochten, ende de Oesterlinghe sloughen doot eens porters clerc van der Sluus, de ghebueren, woenende daer omtrent, ende hoerende dat gheroup van den Oesterlinghen stonden up van haren bedde, ende sy trocken in de huuzen ende herberghen<sup>4</sup> daer de Oesterlinghe woenden ende ghelogiert waren, ende slougher veele doot, ende men seide voerwaer datter meer de lx Oesterlinghen doot bleven.

There came a Fleming, a jester from Sluis, and he went and chatted with the Easterlings, and then those Easterlings spoke to him rather derisively, and then this Fleming went away, and this Fleming got together four or five good friends and went to those houses, where he knew that one of those Easterlings lived and had gone to bed. They went to kill [him], and clambered up through the doors and the windows of the house. Upon hearing that, the Easterling went up to the attic window, shouting and making a ruckus, so that some of his friends upon hearing the yelling came to help him, shouting 'Kill that meddling Fleming dead!' There was much shouting, and the Easterlings struck dead a cleric from Sluis, and upon hearing those cries from the Easterlings, the people who were living around that area got up out of their beds and they invaded the houses and buildings where the Easterlings were living or renting, and they killed many of them, and people said afterwards that more than 60 Easterlings had been killed.

A similar attack on the denizens of London's Hanseatic quarter (Steelyard), whom Richard Grafton (d. 1573) called 'Easterlynges', took place in 1493. In a time of economic recession, the élite of London dismissed their workers and cut wages:

the maisters beyng destitute of sale and traffique, neyther reteyned so many couenaunt seruants and apprentices as before were accustomed . . . nor yet gaue to their seruantes so great stipend and salarie, as before that restraynt they vsed to do. (GC, 197)

As is so often the case under such circumstances, it was not the employers who were held responsible by the dispossessed. Rather, immigrants were made into scapegoats:

For which cause the sayde seruantes entending to worke their malice on the Easterlynges . . . and began to rifle and spoyle such Chambers and Warehouses as they could get into . . . And when their gates were shut and made fast, the multitude rushed and beate at the gates with Clubbes and Leauers to haue entred. (GC, 197)

Whether the 'kill or be killed' nature of ethnic strife in Hanseatic settlements justifies the events of 1350 in Visby is a question of ethics, not history, and thus is beyond the scope of the present study. But the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Old West Norse *hús ok herbergi*, Old East Norse *hus oc herberge*.

apparent risk that Hansards might fall prey to revolts from the indigenous communities alongside which they lived—particularly revolts of the poor such as the Peasants' Revolt and the Steelyard case—lends further credibility to the notion that the Black Death was a missed opportunity for the native Gutnish-speaking population in the city. With trade and travel disrupted by the epidemic, the Low Germans were in a vulnerable position. Urban and rural Gotlanders might have joined forces and attempted to seize the jewel of the Baltic.

Why did this not happen? The answer in part must rest with the plague that was blighting the island. True, a population threatened with disease might become rebellious, as in the case of the flagellants, particularly when that plague was weakening the elite as well as the poor (albeit at a lower infection rate for the *élite*). But a diseased population is also intrinsically ill-suited to co-ordinating a revolt, where even the dimmest understanding of the principle of contagion, such as that evinced in Letter B, discourages coming together with others in large groups, and those already infected with the disease are incapacitated. Indeed, the French Jacquerie revolt of 1358, the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and the Lübecker 'Butchers' Revolt' indicate that rebellion was more likely a decade or two *after* the Black Death, when the peasantry and/or artisans had recovered their physical health and the economic ramifications of depopulation were making themselves felt.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, the councillors of Visby obviously felt there was a very real possibility that the Gutnish-speaking Visbyers might become a source of mischief if their energies were left undirected. The existence of Letter B demonstrates this: why produce a version of the Jewish-handlers-gentile-agents accusation, tailored to a specifically Scandinavian geography (*contra* Letter A's German geography), unless one is invested in convincing a Scandinavian-oriented people of the veracity and immediacy of the threat one proposes? If the councillors were able to take it for granted that Gutnish speakers would remain placid, offer no protest at the plausibility of the supposed Jewish plot detailed in Letter A, and allow the plague to pass without finding someone to blame, then the story attested in Letter B would never have been created.

The need to make the Gutnish speakers accept the Keyenort-type antisemitic explanation for the plague must have been all the more severe because the most obvious people to blame were the Hansa men

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Cohn (2006, 229–31) revises the role of the after-effects of the Black Death in late fourteenth-century revolts, though still identifies certain plague-related factors. On the Lübecker case, see Heß 2016, 307–27; Rotz 1976, 215–34.

themselves: Gotland is an island, sixty miles off the coast of Sweden, and so we can say with near certainty that the disease arrived via the maritime traffic dominated by the Hanseatic traders.<sup>6</sup> As has been seen, Pope Clement VI was concerned about the flagellants during the Black Death in no little part because their violence against Jews was disruptive to the peace (and, indeed, because he was opposed in principle to blaming the Jews for the outbreak). All of the circumstances and deductions offered in the present study indicate that the councillors of Visby had an opposite purpose: to preserve the social order—and their own security—by encouraging public participation in a carefully stage-managed spectacle of violence against proxies for Jews. Doubtless, the councillors were also motivated by a need to exert their authority, demonstrating that they were actively responding to the plague rather than abandoning the citizens to their fate. The context of historical unrest between Hansards and the indigenous communities which surrounded them, which we have seen both in Gotland and in other Hanseatic settlements in the Low Countries, the British Isles and elsewhere in the Baltic, however, suggests that their intentions were well-reasoned rather than being a simple knee-jerk response.

<sup>6</sup> On Scandinavian folk-tales which acknowledge that the plague first arrived on foreign ships, see Tangherlini 1988, esp. 177–81; and more generally, Gunnell 2001, 47–59.



## CONCLUSION

### REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING TIDERICUS

Hanseatic self-preservation in the face of a potential threat also goes some way to explaining the silence of sources on the burnings. It is worth reiterating that it was the proletarian German-speaking church of St Olaf's, not the proletarian Gutnish-speaking church of St Michael's, which was proposed as the epicentre of the poisoning scheme. The victims chosen were those with whom the Gutnish speakers would have felt little solidarity: they could accept that Jews had orchestrated the plague, they could see certain Germans being burnt for bringing it about—but not the sort of Germans who were actually running the city, of course. Wealthy Germans with administrative authority and mercantile interests remained unblamed and unburnt. The Visby episode of 1350 would appear to be a vindication of the historical materialist conception of identity, where ethnicity is at its most meaningful as a determining factor when it conforms with class contours (Marx and Engels 1973, 52–57, 124–25). Gutnish speakers in Visby mostly belonged to lower social strata than German speakers, but wealthy Germans put their class identity above their ethnic identity when they chose, out of political expediency, to victimise the German-speaking proletariat. The views of the German-speaking lower classes in Visby have not been prioritised in the present study, partly because they have left so few sources behind, lacking an equivalent to the runic inscriptions of the native Gotlanders, and partly because they had so few options. They could hardly turn to the Gutnish-speaking hinterland for support, as could Gutnish-speaking Visbyers who were usually connected to the countryside by familial descent. Divided from the Gutnish speakers of their own class by language, they were most likely forced into reliance on the German-speaking elite whose needs they served.

Having accepted the fantasy preserved in Letter B, the Gutnish-speaking Visbyers must have felt a sense of catharsis after seeing Tidericus and his co-accused burnt. I would suggest that this catharsis is the largest part of the reason why no native Gotlandic sources record the Visby burnings. Perpetrators had been identified, then they were executed, and no Gutnish speakers were subject to persecution throughout the process.

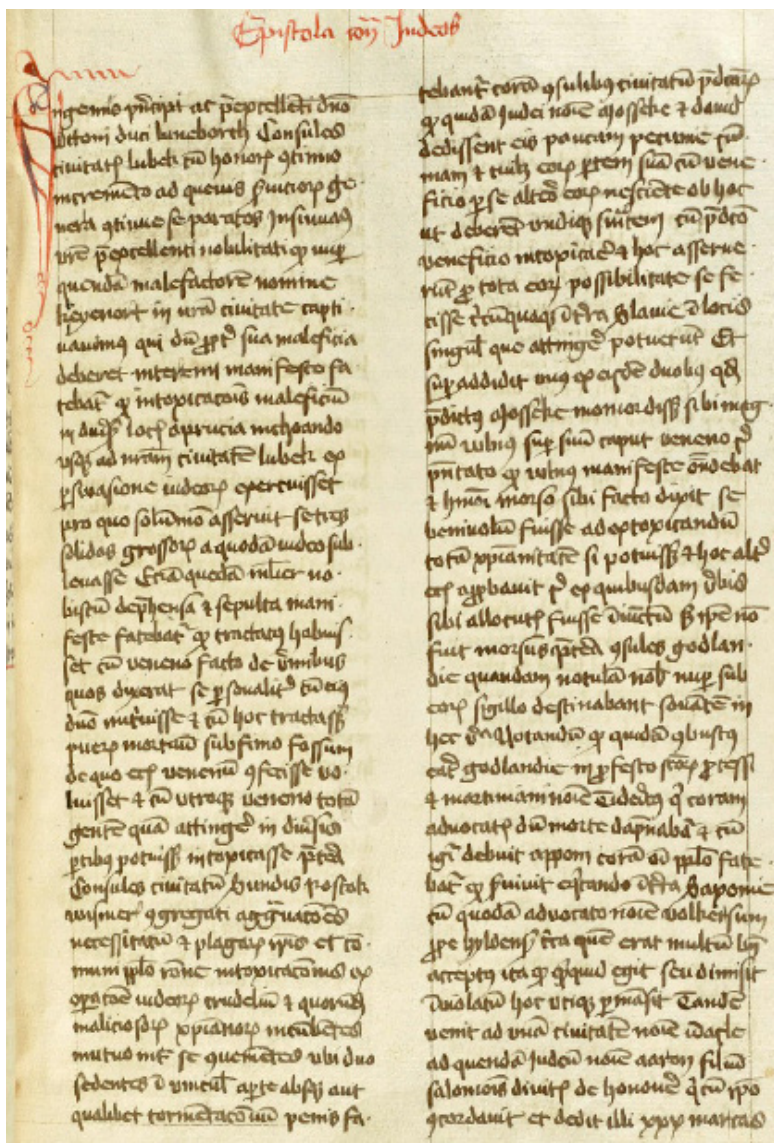
So long as the prevailing viewpoint amongst the indigenous population was that Jews, not Hansards, were to blame for the Black Death, there was no reason to query or discuss Tidericus's fate. Tellingly, the sole indication we have of the Visby burnings enduring in the memory of any party are from the Hanseatic élite: we only have Letters A and B because they were copied by a German scribe in a manuscript dated to between 1428 and 1434 (Mscr. Dresd. A. 59). The letters were copied in a somewhat unusual place, being the final entry in a compilation which otherwise contains a copy of the *Dialogus Pauli et Sauli contra Judæos* by the *converso* Paul of Burgos (d. 1435), a copy of the *Epistola Samuelis Marroccani* by Alfonsus Bonihominis (perhaps a pseudonym for Paul of Burgos) and a further disputational work, *Discrepantie fidei nostrae et iudaeorum* (von Carolsfeld 1882, 19; Simon 2010, 140). As Simon (2010, 140–41) notes, the unifying theme apparently governing the scribe's choice of materials in the manuscript was his concern over the ongoing enmity between Christianity and Judaism. More importantly for our purposes, the availability and relevance of the letters to a German scribe in the fifteenth century suggests that the events were still being recalled in a German-speaking milieu some seventy years after the fact. The identity of the scribe is uncertain. According to the manuscript catalogue, re-examined by Simon (2010, 139–42), the first named owner of the manuscript is one Hinrich Wishagen, described as a *Pleban* (a non-monastic priest or prebendary), though it is not clear whether or not Hinrich was also the scribe.

Simon (2010, 140–41) observes that the texts in the manuscript are obviously theological, but their disputational quality is also somewhat legalistic. The scribe also apparently had access to Hanseatic correspondence, either in the form of a ledger or as loose letters. This combination of theological and juridical, and widely circulated texts together with presumably rare breviary material, rather makes one suspect that the compiler was rooted both in clerical and Hanseatic culture. Perhaps he was a merchant who had renounced the mercantile life to become a monk, or perhaps he was a priest in the service of a Hanseatic family. Although the unanswerable question of how many Scandinavian sources have been lost must always hover over our speculation, it is tempting to postulate that memory of the Tidericus episode survived longer in the German-speaking sphere than in the Scandinavian-speaking sphere. If so, it may be because the Hanseatic élite of Visby in 1350 were conscious that they faced a potential crisis, where unless public opinion was expediently manipulated they were in risk of becoming victims of

violence themselves. The indigenous Gotlanders, on the other hand, appear to have remained largely unaware of the political manipulation to which they had been subjected.

Despite the apparent fears of the Hansards, our sources record no disturbances or grumblings against Hanseatic rule on the part of the Gutnish-speaking Visbyers either during the Black Death or in its immediate aftermath—a quiet period compared to the tension between the town and the countryside in the late thirteenth century and earlier (Harrison 2002, 704–12). Granted, there was not a very long window of opportunity for latent dissatisfaction to show itself, as the city was conquered by Valdemar Atterdag in 1361, and never quite recovered its wealth and importance during the following two centuries of piratical attacks and foreign incursions. Instead of seeking intervention from their kinsmen in the countryside, it would seem that the Gutnish-speaking Visbyers accepted the outlandish fantasy put before them. Fear of their overlords coalesced with the internalisation of potent antisemitic ideas, their minds conveniently prepared by preaching and church art which long predated the machinations of the Hansards. Just as Sartre's model of antisemitism (or at least my modification of it) predicts, illusory Jews were more psychologically convenient scapegoats than the local privileged class, along whose trade networks the plague had spread (for an example of medieval people recognising the role of commerce in infection, see p. 25 n. 7, p. 74 n. 6 in the present work). The outcome was that the summer of 1350 was a period of intrigue against imaginary enemies rather than revolt. The deaths of Tidericus and the others thus attest to two truths, both depressing and neither wholly surprising. First, that the wealthy and powerful have long cried 'It's the Jews! It's the Muslims! It's the Syrians! It's the Mexicans!' when their own position might be threatened. Second, that in such cases the poor and the powerless have long taken sides with the élite, against antagonists entirely of the élite's invention.

Mscr. Dresd. A. 59, 231r–232r. Images reproduced by kind permission of SLUB Dresden.





puri angeli et ceteris bonis hominibus  
 venerabilibus et nobilibus cum  
 quibus christianitas ut sciat deprimere  
 debet et sic declinavit alios  
 ad nuntios videlicet harmonie par-  
 tens gromalve pome holiden  
 herstede hylidenfery et hiden  
 civitatibus omnes sanctos et putatos  
 ac in illis et quicquid quo huius in  
 populum venerabilis superdicti et  
 fidei optus incepit quod modus usus lu-  
 biche fugit cepit et dicit illa dicta  
 propter maras tota totaliter decessit  
 tamen et advenit lubich d' hos  
 pinto hincius fassen sui hassen d' ad  
 videtur nate mayser filii ostendit  
 cui narravit etiam ante d' ad et ille  
 mayser ipse d' ad p' maras tub  
 et quodam p'vide et venerabilis  
 adonavit et sic de lubich usus vno  
 uen boreh in d' ad p'vne t'usueli  
 fiamur d' ad p' l' h'os et p' l' os  
 ubi tradit mortem et m' ad d' ad  
 inde ubi vno d' ad p' l' caput m' ad  
 fecit et d' ad d' ad h'assenputte  
 ubi p' l' h'os et p' l' os m' ad  
 de p' d' ad de m' ad d' ad goldinge  
 ubi p' l' et m' p' l' os et p' l' os et ubi  
 in vanda et caput m' ad fecit us  
 civit' p' p' p' l' os p' l' os p' p' l' os  
 tunc omib' martiribus et m' ad fecit de  
 cadem d' ad p' d' ad ad l' l' os f' ad  
 et d' ad v' ad f' ad et p' l' os op' ad  
 omib' m' ad d' ad m' ad d' ad vno corp  
 hoc ut appareret p' d' ad m' ad p' ad  
 et destructione fuit toti christianit' in  
 petimus ad diligetia qua valeamus  
 ordinare vram nobili et d' ad

quatenus p' missa d' ad cordi vno  
 mart' m' ad et m' ad p' ad m' ad  
 qua christianitas et dolens aggru-  
 ta h'omine m' ad p' ad ordina-  
 do amos d' ad et m' ad vno p' ad  
 aie in salute ut videri d' ad d' ad  
 totus p' ad d' ad et quo m' ad p' ad  
 p' ad m' ad et tota christianitas  
 ad d' ad p' ad d' ad de p' ad vno  
 vno m' ad d' ad vno m' ad d' ad  
 l' ad et aggruato qua p' ad et p' ad  
 m' ad vno d' ad p' ad vno corp  
 r' ad no cesset qua d' ad vno vno  
 sub p' ad d' ad aliquos p' ad p' ad  
 d' ad illi p' ad vno et m' ad  
 vno corp et h'omine op' ad m' ad  
 f' ad p' ad d' ad d' ad vno vno  
 p' ad p' ad p' ad d' ad vno p' ad  
 g' ad d' ad p' ad d' ad p' ad  
 t' ad vno de p' ad vno baptizati  
 m' ad d' ad corp de p' ad et d' ad  
 d' ad m' ad et h'omine op' ad in  
 p' ad d' ad totaliter amos d' ad  
 h' ad p' ad

**O**mnibus p' ad vno seu audi-  
 tur p' ad m' ad p' ad p' ad  
 d' ad d' ad et p' ad p' ad  
 vno nos h'omine d' ad h'omine  
 vno d' ad p' ad vno et vno  
 d' ad d' ad et p' ad corp p' ad  
 l' ad p' ad in h'omine d' ad  
 et d' ad vno d' ad p' ad et  
 p' ad vno et p' ad d' ad corp  
 p' ad p' ad et p' ad vno  
 vno d' ad d' ad d' ad  
 m' ad vno et vno vno d' ad  
 d' ad nos nate m' ad seu



## Appendix 2: The Visby Letters (Semi-diplomatic Latin text)

The Visby letters have been edited before by by Carl Friedrich Wehrmann in 1871. Additionally, Letter B was edited by Hans Aili in 1990. Although these editions are readable, the letters are not in the cleanest Latin, and both editors found it necessary to make emendations in order to produce intelligible text. I offer here a semi-diplomatic edition which compares the readings and emendations of Wehrmann and Aili as well as those I have made myself.

All expanded abbreviations are denoted by italics. The tironian nota 7 for *et* has been expanded in brackets, as I do not consider it an abbreviation *per se*. Features in the original text which I have not reproduced include the German ß for *s* or *ss*, and the use of a punctum as a hyphen when the text is split across columns (redundant, as I do not reproduce the original layout). Diacritics which are not abbreviations have been retained, as has the original capitalisation or non-capitalisation for new sentences and proper nouns. Supplied characters are given in square brackets.

The hand is a comparatively legible German secretary script (*Kanzleischrift*), typical of the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>1</sup> As is often the case in this sort of handwriting, ‘c’ and ‘t’ are not well differentiated, nor are ‘u’ and ‘v’. I suspect that the difficult Latin was found in the scribe’s exemplar rather than introduced by him. Perhaps a rather modern-seeming fidelity to the text on the part of the scribe dissuaded him from making his own emendations. Perhaps he was simply too tired at the end of a fairly long manuscript of 232 folios.

### Epistola contra Judeos

[Letter A]

Ingenuo principi ac *preexcellenti domino* Ottoni duci<sup>2</sup> luneborch Consules civitatis lubek cum honoris *continuo* incremento ad queis *serviciorum* genera *continuo* se paratos [.]

Insinuamus *vestre preexcellenti nobilitati quod nuper quendam malefactorem* nomine këyenort in *nostra* ciuitate captivavimus qui *dum propter* sua maleficia deberet interemi manifesto fatebatur *quod* intoxicatoines<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The script corresponds well with the diagnostic features provided by Bischoff (1979, 215).

<sup>2</sup> Wehrmann supplies *de*.

<sup>3</sup> *Sic*.

maleficium in diuersis locis a prucia inchoando usque ad nostram ciuitatem lubek ex persuasione iudeorum exercuisset pro quo solummodo asseruit se tres solidos grossorum a quodam iudeo subleuasse [.]. Eciam quedam mulier nobiscum deprehensa (et) sepulta manifeste fatebatur quod tractatus habuisset cum ueneno facto de uermibus quos dixerat se personaliter cum eius domino nutriuisset (et) cum hoc tractatasset puerum mortuum sub fimo fossum de quo eciam uenenum confecisse uoluisset (et) cum utroque uenono totam gentem quam attingere in diuersis partibus potuisset intoxicasse [.].

preterea Consules ciuitatum Sundis [,] rostok [,] wismer congregati<sup>4</sup> aggrauationes<sup>5</sup> necessitatum (et) plagarum ipsis et communi populo ratione<sup>6</sup> intoxicaciones<sup>7</sup> ex operatione iudeorum crudelium (et) quorundam maliciosorum xpistianorum incumbentes mutuo inter se conuenientes ubi duo sedentes in uinculis<sup>8</sup> aperte absque aut qualibet<sup>9</sup> tormentacionum penis fatebantur coram consulibus ciuitatum predictarum quod quidam Iudei nomine Mosseke (et) dauid dedissent eis paucam pecunie sumnam (et) cuil[ib]et eorem partem suam cum ueneficio per se altero eorem nesciente ob hoc ut deberent undique s[a]nitatem<sup>10</sup> cum predicto ueneficio intoxicare (et) hoc asseruerunt pro tota eorum possibilitate se fecisse circumquaque in terra Slaue in<sup>11</sup> locis singulis que attingere potuerunt [.]. Et super addidit unus ex eisdem duobus quod predictus Mosseke momordisset<sup>12</sup> sibi magnum uulnus super suum caput ueneno sibi presentato quod uulnus<sup>13</sup> manifeste ostendebat (et) hui[us]modi morsio<sup>14</sup> sibi facto dixit se beniuolum fuisse ad extoxicandum<sup>15</sup> totam xpistianitatem si potuisset (et) hoc alter

<sup>4</sup> Wehrmann supplies *fuerunt*, *propter*, i.e. . . . *Sundis, Rostok, Wismer congregati fuerunt, propter aggrauaciones* . . .

<sup>5</sup> Strictly speaking, the suspension mark does not indicate an ‘I’, so one might also read erroneous ‘aggrauatonens’.

<sup>6</sup> The same suspension mark usually denotes a nasal consonant, although as above it may simply denote a non-specific abbreviation.

<sup>7</sup> As above.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Cappelli 1954, 353.

<sup>9</sup> Wehrmann emends: *actione qualibet aut*

<sup>10</sup> Wehrmann emends: *christianitatem*

<sup>11</sup> Wehrmann: *et*

<sup>12</sup> Here the third minim on the second <m> appears to be a new pen-stroke, i.e. *moniordisset*.

<sup>13</sup> The first two <u>s are conjoined, so one might transcribe ‘wlnus’, but the form does not look deliberate in the way that the scribe’s <w> does in later *Wisbicensis*.

<sup>14</sup> Wehrmann emends: *morsu*

<sup>15</sup> *Sic*. Wehrmann: *intoxicandum*



*eciam approbavit sibi ex quibusdam uerbis sibi allocutis fuisse iniunctum sed ipse non fuit morsus [.]*

*preterea consules godlandie quandam notulam nobis nuper sub eorum sigillo destinabant sonantem in hec uer[b]a<sup>16</sup> [.] Notandum quod quidam combustus erat godlandie in profesto sanctorum processi (et) martini-ani nomine Tidericus qui coram aduocatis dum morte dampnaba[t]ur (et) cum igni debuit apponi coram ad<sup>17</sup> populo fatebatur ex seruiuit equitando in terra Saxonie cum quodam aduocato nomine volkersum prope hyldensem circa quem erat multum bene acceptus ita quod qui[d] quid egit seu dimisit inuiolatum hoc utique permansit [.] Tandem uenit ad unam ciuitatem nomine Dasle ad quendam Iudeum nomine aaron filium salomonis<sup>18</sup> diuitis de honouere qui cum ipso concordauit et dedit illi xxx marcas puri argenti cum cccis<sup>19</sup> bursiculis cum ueneficiis (et) intoxicac[i]onibus cum quibus xpistianitatem ut fecit destruere deberet [.] Et sic declinauit ab eo ad ciuitates uidel[ic]et<sup>20</sup> hannouerem<sup>21</sup> [.] patensem [.] gronowe [.] peyne [.] bokelem [.] tzerstede [.] hyldensem (et) ibidem inciuitatibus omnes fontes (et) puteos ac in villis circumquaque quo transiit intoxicauit ueneficiis supradictis et cum populus incepit com[m]un[i]ter mori<sup>22</sup> uersus lubeke fugam cepit (et) in uia illa dictas xxx marcas totas totaliter detesserauit [.] Et cum uenit lubek in hospicio hermanni sassen sui hospitis quidam iudeus nomine moyses sibi occurrebat cui narrauit omnia ante dicta<sup>23</sup> (et) ille moyses ipsi Tiderico x marcas lubecenses cum quodam pixide cum ueneficiis condonauit (et) sic de lubek uersus urowenborch in terra prucie transuelificauit ibi circa xl homines uel plures ibi traditis<sup>24</sup> morti (et) inde uersus Memele ubi iterum circa xl capita interfecit [.] Et deinde uersus hassenputh ubi xl homines u(e)l plures morie[ban]tur de predictis [.] Deinde uersus goldinge ubi xl. (et) in piltena xl homines (et) ultra in winda quot capita interfecit nesciuit propter ipsorum pluralitatem exceptis curionibus<sup>25</sup>*

<sup>16</sup> The suspension mark for *er* is legible, as is the top of what, from context, must be a <b>, though the loop is missing.

<sup>17</sup> Wehrmann reads: *coram omni populo fatebatur*

<sup>18</sup> Again, the third minim is freestanding on the <m>.

<sup>19</sup> Wehrmann has simply *ccc*. The *-is* must be *centesimis*.

<sup>20</sup> Following Wehrmann: *videlicet*

<sup>21</sup> *Hannoveram* would be a more usual accusative form, as per Wehrmann.

<sup>22</sup> A difficult reading, presumably an *r*-rotunda suspended above the <i>.

<sup>23</sup> Wehrmann's reading. In MS, something like *dcā*.

<sup>24</sup> Wehrmann: *tradidit*

<sup>25</sup> Wehrmann: *Cur[i]onibus*

mortuis (et) interfectis de eodem [.]. Ibi predictum ad littora fodit<sup>26</sup> (et) ibi remansit [.].

*Sed quia* ex huiusmodi operac[i]onibus maledictis maliciorum<sup>27</sup> iudeorum heu ut apparet periculum irrecup(er)a[bi]le (et) destructionem sistit<sup>28</sup> toti xp[ri]stianit[a]ti petimus omni diligencia qua ualemus cordin-time uestram nobili[ta]tis dominacionem quatenus premissa omnia cordi uestro imprimartis miseriam (et) necessitatis mole[m] qua xp[ri]stianitas (est) dolenter aggrauata benigne inspicientes ordinando amore dei (et) iusticie uestre proprie anime in salutem ut iudei in uestris territoriis existentes ex quo indifferenter sunt emuli Xristi (et) tocius xp[ri]stianitatis odiosi persecutores destruantur iudicio uestro mediante [.]. Nam timendum quod mor[tal]itatis aggrauacio qua populus (et) xp[ri]stianitas undique ex consiliis iudeorum cruciatus<sup>29</sup> non cesset quamdiu ipsi iudei sub protectione aliquorum principum (et) dominorum illesi possint residere (et) munere eorum pro huiusmodi operac[i]on[i]bus maliciosis exercendis erogare [.]. Cristus uos conseruet [.]. Respons[um] vestrum<sup>30</sup> de premissis nobis petimus reformari [.]. Scriptum nostro sub sigillo.

Eciam consules thurunenses scripserunt nobis de pluribus iudeis baptizatis in ciuitate eorum deprehensis (et) omnes recognouissent quod huiusmodi operacio intoxicac[i]onis totaliter a iudeis ortum habet processum.

<sup>26</sup> My emendation: *Ibi predictum in littore fossus est et ibi remansit*. Wehrmann suggests: *Ibi predictum argentum ad littus infodit*. As previously stated, I reason against this because 1) the money seems to have been spent and 2) the topic of the preceding sentences is Tidericus, not his silver; 3) this is the point in the letter where, narratively, it makes sense to draw an end to the story of Tidericus. I hope that my emendation reflects a lighter touch, as it does not introduce a new noun. When making an emendation such as this, it is important to remember that the lost autograph letter probably contained highly imperfect Latin. What combination of preposition, and then what case, would the scribe originally have used with *littus*, for example? Indeed, it is very plausible that the autograph letter had just the same puzzling form we find in the later apograph. Here, I am attempting to strike a balance between reproducing what the letter's author meant, and what he might have first put on the page, but I am all too aware that the modern emendation can make no definitive claim to be either. I suspect that the scribe's form might have lacked the *est*, i.e. simply *Ibi predictum in littore fossus*, because the same missing verb error is seen later: *Preterea consules civitatum Sundis, Rostok, Wismer congregati aggrauaciones*. . . However, this is obviously highly speculative.

<sup>27</sup> Wehrmann: *maliciosorum*

<sup>28</sup> Wehrmann emends: *destructio existit*

<sup>29</sup> Wehrmann reads: *cruciatur*. I emend to *cruciatur*.

<sup>30</sup> Supplied by Wehrmann from MS: γū

## [Letter B]

Uniuersis pre[se]ncia visuris seu audituris Consules in rostok sincere dilectionis constanciam cum prompto<sup>31</sup> famulatu [.]. Noueritis nos literas clausas honestorum uirorum dominorum<sup>32</sup> consulum ciuitatis wisbicensis terre godlandie (et) sigillo eorum sigillatas recepissee in hec uer[b]a [.]

[‘]Honorabilibus (et) discretis uiris dominis preconsubus<sup>33</sup> (et) consubus ciuitatis rostok amicis eorum specialibus proconsules<sup>34</sup> (et) consules ciuit[at]is wisbicensis terre godlandie obsequiosum in omnibus uoluntatem [.]. Nouerit uestra discretio gloriosa<sup>35</sup> nos nouem maleficos seu intoxicatores (et) proditores tocius xpistianitatis a pascha huc usque nobiscum deprehendisse inter quos unus erat organista qui coram communi populo in ultimo sue uite (et) eciam prius non coactus lucide fatebatur quod omnes puteos in ciuitatibus Stocholm [.]. Arosie [.]. Arbog<sup>a</sup> (et) singulas paludes aquas stantes puteos alios quo transiit sweciam circumquaque suis ueneficiis intoxicauit ipsiusque ueneficii magnam partem cum ipso (et) pos[t] ipsum inuenimus quod penitus (et) non immerito est destructum [.]. Eciam dixit idem in ex[t]remis suis cum igni debuit apponi quod actu nobiscum puluerem que[n]dam coxerat (et) temperauerat de quo unus<sup>36</sup> hominum in tota terra godlandie si uixisset ad unius anni circulum uiuus non debuit remansisse suis dumtaxat exceptis [.].

Ceterum ibidem recognauit quod plurimi essent de sua societate qui se pro diuitibus mercatoribus (et) quibuscumque aliis per totum mundum officiis reputant (et) per plurimos reputantur (et) uadunt cum singulis<sup>37</sup> argenteis (et) omnis tales incedunt quasi deliri (et) aliquid insensati eciam tales quodam signo greco uel hebrayco sunt signati [.]. ultimatim dixit [.] [‘] nescio plura uobis dicere sed tota xpistianitas est per iudeos (et) pessimos nos intoxicata [’] [.]

Ceterum percipit[ur]<sup>38</sup> quod inter predictos nouem duo fuerunt qui se pro sacerdotibus reputauerunt qui deteriora omnibus prefatis fatebantur [.]. Sed cum debuit poni ad ignem dixit singulariter unus horum [.] [‘] Tota xpistianitas perdita est nisi diuinitus medicetur quia uobis cauere debetis pro sacerdotibus (et) religiosi aliis quibuscumque [’] [.] Idem fatebatur

<sup>31</sup> Wehrmann reads *promptu* and emends to *prompto*. Followed by Aili.

<sup>32</sup> Wehrmann reads *duorum* and emends to *dominorum*. Followed by Aili.

<sup>33</sup> Wehrmann emends: *proconsulibus*. Followed by Aili.

<sup>34</sup> Wehrmann emends: *proconsules*. Followed by Aili.

<sup>35</sup> Wehrmann emends: *graciosa*

<sup>36</sup> Aili: *unius*

<sup>37</sup> Wehrmann emends: *cingulis*. Followed by Aili.

<sup>38</sup> Supplied by Wehrmann. Followed by Aili.

[quod]<sup>39</sup> feria secunda<sup>40</sup> penthecostes cum missam celebrat<sup>41</sup> in ecclesia sancti Olaui nobiscum mapulam quam ad hoc officium peragendo<sup>42</sup> habuit veneficiis intoxicauit ita ut omnes in offertorio ipsam osculantes tertia die fuerunt mortui aut quarta (et) similiter omnes ipsos visitantes [.]

Quare scientes quod pleba[n]us e[i]usdem ecclesie (et) tres alii sacerdotes (et) plurimi alii nostri conciuēs breuiter sunt mortui de eodem (et) commorantes omnes (et) conuersantes moriebantur cum eisdem (et) ut dixerunt experti sumus proch dolor hoc in toto [:] igitur secundum sua premissa facta (et) fassa ut premittitur exigenciam sui meriti susceperunt [.] Sagacitatem igitur vestram<sup>43</sup> peti[m]us prece multa quatenus ciuitatibus (et) uillis circumquaque circa vos situatis sollicite nuncietis [.] Et si aliqua xpistianitati seu nobis nociua perceperitis nos precautos utique habeatis quod uobis similiter facere non negemus [.] Dominus uos conseruunt<sup>44</sup> uobis fideliter percepturi [.]

Nos igitur consules [de]<sup>45</sup> rostok volentes acquiescere petitionibus consulum wisbicensium propter communem<sup>46</sup> bonum terre premissa uobis notificamus secreto nostro sigillo tergotenus communita ut eo melius quantum poteritis (et) deus annuerit uobis poteritis precauere (et) aliis quibus ualueritis<sup>47</sup> intimare [.]

Datum per copiam Et facta sunt hec circa annos<sup>48</sup> domini m<sup>o</sup> ccc<sup>o</sup> quinquagesimo<sup>49</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Supplied by Wehrmann. Followed by Aili.

<sup>40</sup> Expanded from: 2<sup>a</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Wehrmann emends: *celebraret*. Followed by Aili.

<sup>42</sup> Aili emends: *peragendum*

<sup>43</sup> Here <a> and <m> appear combined in a ligature, i.e. v̄rān. Alternatively, the given letters may be v̄r̄m.

<sup>44</sup> Second <u> is just one minim.

<sup>45</sup> Supplied by Wehrmann. Followed by Aili.

<sup>46</sup> Silently emended by Wehrmann to *commune*. Followed by Aili.

<sup>47</sup> Emended by Wehrmann to *volueritis*. Rejected by Aili.

<sup>48</sup> Emended to *annos* by Wehrmann (although in his edition he confuses his emendation in the footnotes with the body of the text. Aili places *annum* in the body of the text, and *annos* in the footnotes).

<sup>49</sup> Emended by Wehrmann to *quinquagesimum*. Followed by Aili.

### Appendix 3: The Visby Letters (Normalised Latin text)

The following is an attempt to provide the most readable possible Latin text of the two letters. It is not necessarily a forensic reconstruction of the lost originals. For example, I doubt that the autographs used the preposition *de* before 'Luneborch' or 'Rostok', but their omission would not lead to a more readable text, and my semi-diplomatic edition already reflects this textual reality. For this reason, I continue to cite the Wehrmann and Aili editions (with annotations making clear their emendations) in the body of the text of this book. Nonetheless, as the Wehrmann and Aili editions are not widely accessible in libraries outside of Germany and Scandinavia respectively, this appendix provides the letters in full, in their original language, and in a readable condition.

Emendations recommended in my semi-diplomatic edition (Appendix 2) are accepted. Punctuation generally follows Wehrmann for Letter A and Aili for Letter B. Spellings have sometimes been de-medievalised so as to be more compatible with popular dictionaries and electronic reading aids used by today's students of Latin (thus 'i' for 'j', widely 't' for 'c', although differentiation between 'u' and 'v' has generally been retained).

#### **Epistola contra iudeos**

[Letter A]

Ingenuo principi ac preexcellenti domino Ottoni duci de Luneborch, consules civitatis Lubek cum honoris continuo incremento ad quevis serviciorum genera continuo se paratos.

Insinuamus vestre preexcellenti nobilitati, quod nuper quendam malefactorem, nomine Keyenort, in nostra civitate captivavimus, qui, dum propter sua maleficia deberet interemi, manifesto fatebatur, quod intoxicationes maleficium in diversis locis a Prucia inchoando usque ad nostram civitatem Lubek ex persuasione iudeorum exercuisset pro quo solummodo asseruit se tres solidos grossorum a quodam iudeo sublevasse. Eciam quedam mulier nobiscum deprehensa et sepulta manifeste fatebatur, quod tractatus habuisset cum veneno facto de vermibus, quos dixerat se personaliter cum eius domino nutritisse et cum hoc tractatasset puerum mortuum sub fimo fossum, de quo eciam venenum confecisse voluisset, et cum utroque venono totam gentem, quam attingere in diversis partibus potuisset intoxicasse.

Preterea consules civitatum Sundis, Rostok, Wismer congregati fuerunt, propter aggravationes necessitatum et plagarum ipsis et communi populo ratione intoxicationes ex operatione iudeorum crudelium et quorundam

maliciosorum Christianorum incumbentes mutuo inter se convenientes ubi duo sedentes in vinculis aperte absque aut qualibet tormentationum penis fatebantur coram consulibus civitatum predictarum, quod quidam iudei, nomine Mosseke et David, dedissent eis paucam pecunie sumnam et cuilibet eorem partem suam cum veneficio per se, altero eorem nesciente, ob hoc, ut deberent undique Christianitatem cum predicto veneficio intoxicare, et hoc asseruerunt pro tota eorum possibilitate se fecisse circumquaque in terra Slavie in locis singulis, que attingere potuerunt. Et super addidit unus ex eisdem duobus, quod predictus Mosseke momordisset sibi magnum vulnus super suum caput, veneno sibi presentato, quod vulnus manifeste ostendebat, et huiusmodi morsu sibi facto dixit se benivolum fuisse ad intoxicandum totam Christianitatem, si potuisset, et hoc alter eciam approbavit sibi ex quibusdam verbis sibi allocutis fuisse iniunctum, sed ipse non fuit morsus.

Preterea consules Godlandie quandam notulam nobis nuper sub eorum sigillo destinabant sonantem in hec verba: Notandum, quod quidam combustus erat Godlandie in profesto Sanctorum Processi et Martiniani, nomine Tidericus, qui coram advocatis, dum morte dampnabatur, et cum igni debuit apponi coram ad populo fatebatur ex servivit, equitando in terra Saxonie cum quodam avvocato, nomine Volkersum, prope Hyldensem, circa quem erat multum bene acceptus, ita quod quidquid egit seu dimisit, inviolatum hoc utique permansit. Tandem venit ad unam civitatem, nomine Dasle, ad quendam iudeum, nomine Aaron, filium Salomonis divitis de Honovere, qui cum ipso concordavit et dedit illi xxx marcas puri argenti cum ccc<sup>is</sup> bursiculis cum veneficiis et intoxicationibus, cum quibus Christianitatem, ut fecit, destruere deberet. Et sic declinavit ab eo ad civitates, videlicet Hannoveram, Patensem, Gronowe, Peyne, Bokelem, Tzerstede, Hyldensem et ibidem incivitatibus omnes fontes et puteos ac in villis circumquaque, quo transiit intoxicavit veneficiis supradictis, et cum populus incepit communiter mori versus Lubeke fugam cepit et in via illa dictas xxx marcas totas totaliter detesseravit. Et cum venit Lubek, in hospicio Hermanni Sassen, sui hospitis, quidam iudeus, nomine Moyses, sibi occurrebat, cui narravit omnia ante dicta, et ille Moyses ipsi Tiderico x marcas Lubecenses cum quodam pixide cum veneficiis condonavit, et sic de Lubek versus Vrowenborch in terra Prucie transvelificavit, ibi circa xl homines vel plures ibi tradidit morti, et inde versus Memele, ubi iterum circa xl capita interfecit, et deinde versus Hassenputh, ubi xl homines vel plures moriebantur de predictis. Deinde versus Goldinge, ubi xl, et in Piltena xl homines, et ultra in Winda quot capita interfecit, nescivit propter ipsorum pluralitatem exceptis Curionibus mortuis et interfectis de eodem. Ibi predictum in littore fossus et ibi remansit.

Sed quia ex huiusmodi operationibus maledictis maliciosorum iudeorum, heu, ut apparet, periculum irrecoverabile et destructio existit toti Christianitati, petimus, omni diligentia qua valemus, cordintime vestram nobilitatis dominationem, quatenus premissa omnia cordi vestro impri-martis, miseriam et necessitatis molem, qua Christianitas est dolenter aggravata, benigne inspicientes, ordinando amore Dei et iusticie, vestre proprie anime in salutem, ut iudei in vestris territoriis existentes, ex quo indifferenter sunt emuli Christi et totius Christianitatis odiosi persecutores, destruantur iudicio vestro mediante. Nam timendum, quod mortalitatis aggravatio, qua populus et Christianitas undique ex consiliis iudeorum cruciatur, non cesset, quamdiu ipsi iudei sub protectione aliquorum principum et dominorum illesi possint residere et munere eorum pro huiusmodi operationibus maliciosis exercendis erogare. Christus vos conservet! Responsum vestrum de premissis nobis petimus reformari. Scriptum nostro sub sigillo.

Eciam consules Thurunenses scripserunt nobis de pluribus iudeis baptizatis in civitate eorum deprehensis, et omnes recognovissent, quod huiusmodi operatio intoxicationis totaliter a iudeis ortum habet processum.

[Letter B]

Universis presentia visuris seu auditoris consules in Rostok sincere dilectionis constantiam cum prompto famulatu. Noveritis nos literas clausas honestorum virorum dominorum consulum civitatis Wisbicensis terre Godlandie, et sigillo eorum sigillatas recepisse in hec verba:

‘Honorabilibus et discretis viris, dominis proconsulibus et consulibus civitatis Rostok, amicis eorum specialibus, proconsules et consules civitatis Wisbicensis terre Godlandie obsequiosum in omnibus voluntatem. Noverit vestra discretio gloriosa nos novem maleficos seu intoxicatores et proditores totius Christianitatis a Pascha huc usque nobiscum deprehendisse, inter quos unus erat organista, qui coram communi populo in ultimo sue vite et eciam prius non coactus lucide fatebatur, quod omnes puteos in civitatibus Stocholm, Arosie, Arboga et singulas paludes, aquas stantes, puteos alios, quo transiit Sweciam, circumquaque suis veneficiis intoxicavit; ipsiusque veneficii magnam partem cum ipso et post ipsum invenimus, quod penitus, et non immerito est destructum. Eciam dixit idem in extremis suis cum igni debuit apponi, quod actu nobiscum pulverem quendam coxerat et temperaverat, de quo unus hominum in tota terra Godlandie, si vixisset ad unius anni circulum, vivus non debuit remansisse suis dumtaxat exceptis.

‘Ceterum ibidem recognavit, quod plurimi essent de sua societate, qui se pro divitibus mercatoribus et quibuscumque aliis per totum mundum officiis reputant et per plurimos reputantur et vadunt cum cingulis argenteis et omnis tales incedunt quasi deliri et aliquid insensati, eciam tales quodam signo greco vel hebrayco sunt signati. Ultimatum dixit: “Nescio plura vobis dicere, sed tota Christianitas est per iudeos (et) pessimos nos intoxicata!”

‘Ceterum percipitur, quod inter predictos novem duo fuerunt, qui se pro sacerdotibus reputaverunt, qui deteriora omnibus prefatis fatebantur. Sed cum debuit poni ad ignem, dixit singulariter unus horum: “Tota Christianitas perdita est, nisi divinitus medicetur, quia vobis cavere debetis pro sacerdotibus et religiosis aliis quibuscumque.” Idem fatebatur, quod feria secunda Penthecostes, cum missam celebraret in ecclesia Sancti Olavi nobiscum, mapulam, quam ad hoc officium peragendum habuit, veneficiis intoxicavit, ita ut omnes in offertorio ipsam osculantes tertia die fuerunt mortui aut quarta et similiter omnes ipsos visitantes.

‘Quare scientes, quod plebanus eiusdem ecclesie et tres alii sacerdotes et plurimi alii nostri concives breviter sunt mortui de eodem, et commorantes omnes et conversantes moriebantur cum eisdem, et, ut dixerunt, experti sumus, proch dolor, hoc in toto: igitur secundum sua premissa facta et fassa, ut premittitur, exigentiam sui meriti susceperunt. Sagacitatem igitur vestram petimus prece multa, quatenus civitatibus et villis circumquaque circa vos situatis solliciti nuncietis. Et si aliqua Christianitati seu nobis nociva perceperitis, nos precautos utique habeatis, quod vobis similiter facere non negemus. Dominus vos conservunt! Vobis fideliter percepturi.’

Nos igitur consules de Rostok volentes acquiescere petitionibus consulum Wisbicensium propter communem bonum terre premissa vobis notificamus secreto nostro sigillo tergotenus communita, ut eo melius, quantum poteritis et Deus annuerit vobis poteritis precavere et aliis, quibus valueritis, intimare.

Datum per copiam, et facta sunt hec circa annum Domini m’o ccc’o quinquagesimum.



## Appendix 4: The Visby Letters (English Translation)

### Letter A

To the noble prince and pre-eminent lord, Duke Otto of Lüneburg, we, the councillors of the city of Lübeck, are ready at once with the continuing, honourable advancement of whatever tasks you send us.

We notify your pre-eminent nobility that we have recently apprehended in our city a certain evil-doer by the name of Keyenort, who on account of his crimes is judged to be executed, confessing plainly to the crime of poisoning in various places in Prussia, right up to our city of Lübeck, trained at the instigation of the Jews,<sup>1</sup> for which he would have got for himself a mere three groats, provided by a certain Jew. Indeed, we have arrested and imprisoned a certain woman [who was] confessing clearly to having a recipe for a poison made from snakes,<sup>2</sup> which she was raising personally with her husband.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps ‘inspired by the persuasion of the Jews’.

<sup>2</sup> Latin *vermibus* is more usually used of worms or maggots. However, suckling at a woman’s breast and being used to make poison are tropes more suited to snakes. In the scribe’s native Low German *wurm* would have denoted both a snake and a worm, a synonymity common to all Germanic languages. In choosing snakes over worms I follow Heß 2015a, 117.

<sup>3</sup> The verb *nutrire* also has the sense ‘to rear’ or ‘suckle’. The woman who gives birth to or suckles snakes is a folkloric commonplace, for example see Stith Thompson nos B391.1, B765.4.1. If the rumour of Keyenort and the female poison-brewer reached Gotland, one wonders whether it would have had particular resonances with local folklore. *Guta saga* records that Huitastierna (‘White Star’), the mythical matriarch of the Gutnish people, had a prophetic dream after conceiving with her husband Pieluar: *fyrstu nat sum þaun saman suafu, þa droymdi henni draumbr; so sum þrir ormar varin slungnir saman barmi hennar; ok þytti henni sum þair skriþin yr barmi hennar* ‘The first night when they slept together, she then dreamt a dream, as though three serpents were intertwined in her womb, and it seemed to her as though they crawled out of her womb’ (*Gus*, 2). The legend was also preserved in the High German *Guta saga* (c.1401), which may represent Gutnish traditions as understood by the German Hansards: *Inder ersten nacht do sy dar czû samene slifen do tromete ir eyn trom wy das drye slangen weren czu samene geulochten an erem bosem vnde lenezil gleten vs erem bosem*. My point here is that there was potentially a mismatch between Lübecker and Gotlandic folklore, where the former reflexively used the image of a woman rearing snakes as a caricature for evil and perversion, while the latter looked to just such an image in their national origin story. Note that *bosem*, which is a Low German form, also means ‘breast’. The same is true of Old Gutnish *\*barmbr*. See Arnoldson 1971 [1915], 107–08. For the High German text, see *CiG*, 162–68. On the creation of Germanophone Gotlandica in the Middle Ages, see Schmid 2006, 62–88. Schmid produces a new

Also,<sup>4</sup> she dragged a dead boy out of a cesspool, and she also planned to make poison out of him, and with either [poison] all the people dwelling in many regions would have been poisoned.

The councillors of the city of Stralsund, Rostock, Wismar are united on account of the harm, of the emergency and of the injuries to both themselves and the common people caused by the poisonings [which are] the work of the hard-hearted Jews, and certain wicked Christians, carried out for pay at prearranged times, whereof two are sitting in chains after being found out through the punishment of torture, confessing before the aforementioned city councillors how certain Jews, by the name of Moss-eke and David, gave them a puny sum of money and each their share of poison with it, the latter of them unknowingly, in order that they should poison the healthy all around with the aforementioned poison, and they maintained it was totally within their power to do this all around the country of Wendland, one place at a time, as they bordered one another. And what is more, one out of the two added that the aforementioned Mosseke bit him with a great wound on his head when he was handed the poison, so that the wound could be clearly seen, and he said that this bite was given to all poisoners of Christians, if he got the chance, out of benevolence,<sup>5</sup> and the other man also proved himself with his words, saying with vigour that he would be on board, but that he would not be bitten.

The councillors of Gotland have recently addressed us a little note sealed with their sigil, saying the following words: It should be noted that a certain man by the name of Tidericus has been burnt at the stake on Gotland, on the Saint's Day of Martinian and Processus.<sup>6</sup> When [Tidericus] was condemned to death he admitted to us—and when he was put

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edition of the High German in his article, though here I have preferred to cite Schlyter as it is probably that with which most Scandinavianists will be familiar.

<sup>4</sup> The Latin is awkward here: *Eciam quedam mulier nobiscum deprehensa et sepulta manifeste fatebatur, quod tractatus habuisse cum veneno facto de vermibus, quos dixerat se personaliter cum ejus domino nutritivisse, et cum hoc tractasset puerum mortuum sub fimo fossum, de quo eciam venenum confecisse voluisset*. . . It would be best if the demonstrative pronoun in *cum hoc* referred to something earlier in the sentence, e.g. the *venenum*, but no satisfactory meaning can be found by that route. Linking the *hoc* to the woman's *dominus* is tempting, but then one would expect the following *tractasset* to be in the plural. I would suggest instead that *cum hoc* is a calque of some conjunction used by the Low German-speaking clerk, perhaps *dārmēde*.

<sup>5</sup> This is presumably supposed to be an identifying mark used by the conspirators, much like the Greek and Hebrew letters from Visby.

<sup>6</sup> 2nd July 1350.

atop the fire he confessed in front of everyone—that he served riding on horseback in the land of Saxony alongside a certain go-between by the name of Volkersum, who lived near Hildesheim, of whose company he was very glad, so that whatever [poison] he made or sent off, it [Hildesheim?] would remain unharmed. At last he went to a certain city called Dassel to meet a certain Jew by the name of Aaron, son of Salomon the Wealthy of Hanover,<sup>7</sup> who made an agreement with him [Aaron] to pay the aforementioned thirty marks of pure silver together with three hundred little pouches with poison and venom with which to eradicate Christianity utterly. And so he departed from him for the cities, namely Hanover, Baden, Gronau, Berne, Bockenem, Sarstedt, Hildesheim, and in each city and in all the surrounding towns he polluted all the wells and water sources as he went with the aforementioned poisons. And when people from every walk of life began to die, he fled towards Lübeck and on the way completely used up his aforementioned thirty marks. And when he reached Lübeck, in the lodgings of Hermann Sassen,<sup>8</sup> his host, a certain Jew by the name of Moses met him and he [Tidericus] told him all the aforesaid things, and this Moses gave Tidericus ten Lübecker marks together with a small medicine box with poison, and thus from Lübeck he sailed for Frombork in the land of Prussia. There he brought about the death of around forty people or more. And from there he headed for Klaipėda, where for a second time he took forty lives, and from there to Aizpute where more than forty died as before. From there to Kuldīga, where forty died, and forty people in Piltene, and beyond the Venta river he did not know himself how many lives he took because of their great number, only that the Courlanders perished and died in the same way. There he was buried at the shore, and there he will remain.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I have found no evidence that Solomon the Wealthy has any more basis in reality than Mosseke, Moses, etc.

<sup>8</sup> A certain Hermann Sassen *borgere to Darpte* ‘a citizen of Tartu’ turns up elsewhere in a piece of Hanseatic correspondence dated to 1410: *LECUR*, col. 738. If this is the same Hermann Sassen, he would have been extraordinarily aged by this point. While not impossible—people did reach their eighties in the Middle Ages—it is more likely that the name is simply a common one, i.e. ‘Hermann the Saxon’.

<sup>9</sup> If my emendation here is correct, then there is an astounding parallel with the West Norse *Gulapingslög* (c.1100, though of complicated dating) which recommends that murderers and traitors should be buried on beaches: *Þat er nu því nest at mann hvern skal til kirkiu föra er dauðr verðr. oc grava i iorð helga. nema uðaða menn. drottens svica. oc morðvarga. tryggrova. oc þiova. oc þa menn er sialver spilla ond sinni. En þa menn er nu talda ec. skal grava i flöðar male. þar sem særr mötesc oc grön torva* ‘Now we shall discuss how everyone should bring to church those

But because the accursed plots of the wicked Jews, alas, would appear to be an incorrigible danger, and [so is] the destruction of all Christendom, we beg for all diligence, so that we will prevail, imploring your noble lordship to send ahead any intelligence sealed with your sigil, be it woe and a heavy burden, because Christendom is sorely oppressed. Kindly examine for the love of God and justice and for the keeping of your soul in good health, if there are any Jews to be found in your territories, who are unmoved by the mocking of Christ and [are] odious persecutors of all Christendom, to destroy them by means of your rule. For example because the people and Christendom will both be tortured by the designs of the Jews unceasingly so long as the Jews are under the protection of a few princes and lords, they are able to stick around and burden them [those princes and Lords?] by means of carrying out these malicious plots. God save you! We beg for your considered reply to us. Signed with our sigil.

Also the councillors of Toruń have written to us that many Jews who had been baptised have been caught in their city, and they all realised how a poisoning plot had thus been completely caused by Jews.

### Letter B

To all who read or hear this letter, please send the councillors of Rostock our sincere friendship and goodwill, and convey our deference. You ought to know that confidential letters have come to us from those honest gentlemen, the councillors of the city of Visby on the island of Gotland, and their letters were sealed with their sigil. These were their words:

‘From the chief councillors and other councillors of the city of Visby on the island of Gotland, to our dear friends, those honourable and distinguished gentlemen, the chief councillors and other councillors of the city of Rostock, we offer our obedience in all matters. Your distinguished excellency should know that over Easter<sup>10</sup> we have arrested nine villains,

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who are dead and bury them in consecrated ground, except for villains, betrayers of their lord, murderers, truce-breakers, and thieves, and those people who waste their own souls [i.e. suicides?]. And those men whom I have just listed should be buried on the shore, where the waters meet the green turf’ (*NGL*, 13 [ch. 23]). The detail may be a coincidence: beach burials are a convenient way to make sure that a body disappears quickly, and like burials at crossroads have a certain folkloric resonance. Perhaps this occurred to the Visbyers and the Gulamenn separately. Alternatively, transmission of ideas is not impossible: the area where *Gulaping* law applied included Bergen, which was obviously an important Hanseatic hub.

<sup>10</sup> Easter Sunday in 1350 fell on 10th April, though here presumably the entire Eastertide is meant.

poisoners and traitors to all Christendom, amongst whom there was an organist who, in the last moments of his life, before the very eyes of the common people, and also with no prior coercion, clearly admitted how he would poison all the wells in the cities of Stockholm, Västerås and Arboga, and every lake, fresh water source and various wells as he travelled around Sweden, everywhere poisoning away with his concoctions. He carried a great deal of his poison-mixing equipment on his person and we have since discovered this—and carefully and not without reason destroyed it. Also, he said in his last moments, when he was about to be put on the fire (as was his sentence), that recently while he had been among us he had mixed and cooked up some powder from which not one living man, with the exception of his own kind, would have remained on the whole island of Gotland, if he [the organist] had lived just one more year.

‘What is more, at the same time he admitted that there are many who belong to a certain society which consisted of rich merchants and all the kinds of people who hold office all over the world, as many people know they do, and each of them goes around with silver belts, and they are all half mad or crazed in some other way. Also, they are all marked with a letter written in Greek or Hebrew.<sup>11</sup> In his last moment he said, “Need I say more? All Christendom has been poisoned by us villains and the Jews.”

‘Furthermore, it was also discovered that amongst the aforementioned nine there were two who were said to be priests, who admitted to the worst deeds of them all. And when one of them was put on the fire, he said in his last hour: “All Christendom is lost, unless a cure comes from the Heavens, because you ought to beware of the words of priests and other religious people!” He admitted that on the second day of Pentecost,<sup>12</sup> when he was celebrating the mass in the church of St Olaf here, he had spiked with poison the maniple which he used to perform the service, so that three or four days later all those who kissed the offertory went to their graves, as did those who came to see them.

‘Thus we know how the congregation of this church, three other priests and a great many of our fellow citizens were killed so quickly by this sickness, and everyone who lived with them or spent time with them died with

<sup>11</sup> The conspirators are *signati* with a *signo*, hence my conclusion that the *signum* is a sort of tattoo rather than a sigil or a piece of parchment bearing a letter.

<sup>12</sup> Whit Monday, which in 1350 would have fallen on 1st June. Assuming that the poisoning actually was attributed to this event (not just in Letter B), and assuming that Tidericus had not already been arrested (he had separate accusations to answer, the well-poisonings in Stockholm, etc.), there is a month-long window in which the arrests could have been made before the executions on 2nd July.

them. And so, much to our anguish, the evidence shows that everything they said was true. Therefore, according to their confessions and their actions, they received the sentences which they deserved.

‘This is why we beg you give your attention to this, sending news to all the cities and towns in your area with great care, and if you discover anything which could be injurious to Christendom or ourselves by all means make it known to us and we will not refuse to do the same for you. Lord save you. We have faith.’

Thus we, the councillors of Rostock, willingly acquiesce to this request from the councillors of Visby, and send forth any news for the sake of the good people of that island, sealed on the back side with our sigil. God willing and your abilities upstanding, you will be on your guard, as will be all the other whom you can reach.

Presented in copy, and these transactions occurred around the year of Our Lord 1350.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This last line is a colophon in a later manuscript (Mscr. Dresd. A. 59, 1434), and therefore presumably the source of Heß’s description of Letters A and B as ‘undated’ and at least in part also the reasoning behind her credible caution that ‘the letters may also refer to events that occurred either before or after the Black Death’ (Heß 2015a, 118). The colophon is convincing, however, given that, as Heß notes, 1350 was indeed when the plague struck Visby. Furthermore, if we imagine a generous leeway of fifty years prior and after the arrival of the Black Death in which to date the letters, the *Ottoni duci (de) Luneborch* to whom Letter A is addressed could only refer to one of three candidates: Otto II, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (d. 1330), Otto the Mild, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (d. 1344), and Otto III, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (d. 1352). As there was a Duke Otto of Lüneburg reigning in 1350 (i.e. Otto III), and 1350 is when the epidemic reached Gotland, and a later note attributes the events to 1350, it is not unreasonable to accept the dating. The colophon is from an apograph made in the fifteenth century (*CdL*, 106) and is therefore our only indication of any person—Gotlandic or Hanseatic, firsthand or secondhand—recalling the events in Visby after the fact. On the manuscript context, see Simon 2010, 139–42.

# Appendix 5: Map Showing the Alleged Wanderings of Tidericus

For the route of Letter A, the reader should begin at Hildesheim (though this is slightly ambiguous in the text) and then proceed to nearby Dassel. The reader will find themselves returning to Hildesheim via Sarstedt, and from there they should follow the route to Lübeck. Of course, this map assumes that the imagined route (to the extent that it was coherently imagined at all) corresponded to the order in which the cities are listed in the letters, which is not necessarily the case. Given the proximity of some of the cities, it may have been imagined that, for example, Berne was poisoned directly after Baden, or Sarstedt directly after Hanover, etc., rather than according to the higgledy-piggledy route across Germany indicated here. On the other hand, the geography of the supposed Baltic leg of the route is quite plausible.



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*CDIHPN* = Paul Fredericq, ed., 1889. *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae* I. Ghent.

*CdL* = Carl Friedrich Wehrmann, ed., 1871. *Codex diplomaticus Lubeccensis, Lübeckisches Urkundenbuch 1. Abt. Urkundenbuch der Stadt Lübeck* 3. Lübeck.

*CiG* = C. J. Schlyter, ed., 1852. *Codex Iuris Gotlandici cum notis criticis, variis lectionibus, nova versione suecana, glossarius et indicibus nominum propriorum*. Lund.

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